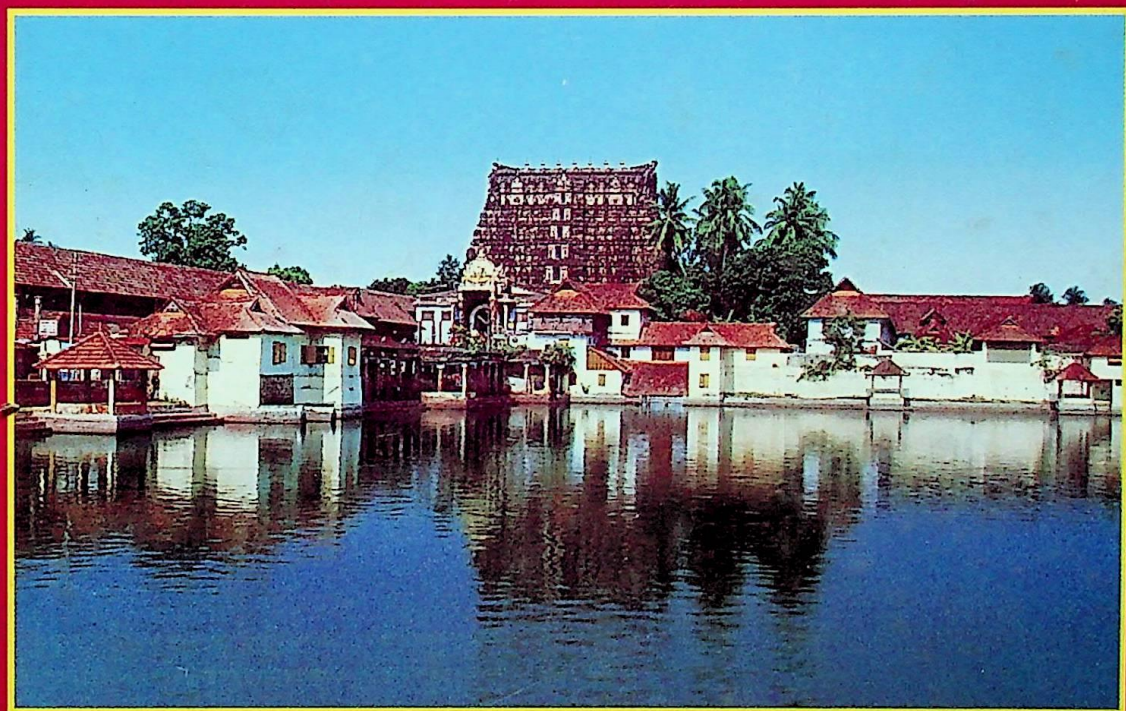




# SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE



Aswathi Thirunal  
Gouri Lakshmi Bayi



Bharatiya Vidya  
**Bhavan**





### *About the Book*

Lauded as one of the one hundred and eight great centres of Vaishnava worship in Bharatha Varsham, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is a treasure-house of art and architecture as well. The influence exerted by this Temple over the State and its people as well as on territories far removed from it, spans centuries. Its glory and importance are multi-dimensional. Despite the changing phases of its evolution, it has guarded and cherished its legacy of spiritualism including continuity of traditional rites and rituals without sacrificing them in the name of progress. This volume is a pilgrimage into the realm of devotion and is a journey into the significant history of the land under its sway, covering many of the inter-related aspects as well. Infusion of royalty has added splendour to its many unique features. An attempt has also been made to present in this volume many little known aspects associated with this Temple. Above all, it strives to receive and transmit the glory of this ancient Abode of the Divine which has faced and outlived the relentless march of time.











**SREE  
PADMANABHA SWAMY  
TEMPLE**



SHREE  
BALDANAKHA SWAMY  
TEMPLE



Purchased  
personally from  
14 premises

Mookerji IFS (Retd) Collection Jammu

# SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE



on 11/2/2012  
After paying to  
the temple  
the  
11. 9th

*Princess Gouri Lakshmi Bayi*



2000

**BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN**  
**KULAPATI MUNSHI MARG**  
**MUMBAI - 400 007**



First Edition : 1995

Second Edition : 2000  
(Revised and enlarged)

Price Rs. : 450/-

### Cover Transparency

Front cover : Rajan, Maharaja Studio, Thiruvananthapuram

Back cover : S. Balakrishnan Unni

Vasudeva Vilasom Ayurveda Pharmacy, Thiruvananthapuram

Printed in INDIA

By Akshara Offset, Vanchiyoor, Thiruvananthapuram – 35 © 471174 and  
Published by S. Ramakrishnan, General Secretary and Executive Director,  
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai – 400 007.



DEDICATION

Veneration  
is respect & worship  
something

*This work of love and <sup>7<sup>th</sup></sup> veneration on the  
Abode of the Paramount Arbiter of Destiny,  
I most humbly dedicate in thanksgiving to  
the living presence of that supreme devotee of  
Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Sree Padmanabha  
Dasa Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Rama  
Varma, my ever-beloved uncle to whom I owe  
so much. Though late in the day, with the  
pilgrimage through these pages, let me say  
"Thank you dearest uncle, thank you".*

*Anees  
(Gouri Lakshmi Bayi)*







॥ श्री शृङ्गेरी श्रीजगद्गुरुमहासंस्थानम् ॥



श्रीमत्परमहंसपरिव्राजकाचार्यवर्य पदवाक्यप्रमाणपारावारपारीण यमनिय-  
मासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाध्यष्टाङ्गयोगानुष्ठाननिष्ठ तपश्चक्रवर्त्यनाद्य-  
विच्छिन्न श्रीशङ्कराचार्यगुरुपरम्पराप्राप्त षड्दर्शनस्थापनाचार्य व्याख्यानसिंहासनाधो-  
श्वर सकलनिगमागमसारहृदय सांख्यत्रयप्रतिपादक वैदिकमार्गप्रवर्तक सर्वतन्त्रस्वतन्त्रा-  
दिराजधानी विद्यानगरमहाराजधानी कर्णाटकसिंहासनप्रतिष्ठापनाचार्य श्रीमद्राजाधि-  
राजगुरु भूमण्डलाचार्य ऋष्यशृङ्गपुरवराधोश्वर तुङ्गभद्रातीरवासि श्रीमद्विद्याशङ्करपाद-  
पयाराधक श्रीजगद्गुरु श्रीमदभिनवविद्यातीर्थस्वामिगुरुकरकमलसञ्ज्ञात

॥ श्री जगद्गुरु शृङ्गेरी श्रीमद्भारतीतीर्थस्वामिभिः ॥

अनन्तशयनक्षेत्रे नैकशतवर्षेभ्यो विराजमानं भगवतः श्रीमदनन्तपद्मनाभस्य सुन्दरं  
मन्दिरमधिकृत्य श्रीपती अनन्तशयनराजवंशीया गौरी लक्ष्मी वायि नाम्नी आंगलभाषया  
निबन्धमेकं व्यलिखत् स च ग्रन्थः मुम्बापुरीस्थ भारतीय विद्याभवनेन प्रकाश्यत इति च  
विज्ञाय मोदामहे वयम् ।

ग्रन्थेस्मिन् नैके विषयाः प्रतिपादिताः एतद् ग्रन्थावलोकनेन अनन्तपद्मनाभदेवालय  
विषयकं समग्रं चित्रं चेतसि परिस्फुरतीति विश्वसिम् ।

ग्रन्थोऽयं विशिष्टप्रचारमेतु ग्रन्थस्यास्य रचयित्री प्रकाशकाश्च श्रेयः परम्पराभिः  
समभिवर्धन्तामिति चाशास्महे ।

यात्रास्थानम् कोयम्बतूर  
भवसंवत्सरीय कुम्भमासीय शुक्ल नवमी भागवत्वासरः  
10.3.95

इति नारायणस्मरणम्







## Translation of the Sreemukham

We are happy to know that Sreemathy Gouri Lakshmi Bayi of the Royal Family of Travancore has written a book in English on the Grand Temple of Sree Padmanabha which has shed its radiance on the city of Thiruvananthapuram for hundreds of years and that it is being published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay.

A number of topics have been dealt within this work. We believe that by perusing this volume it will be possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of this great Temple.

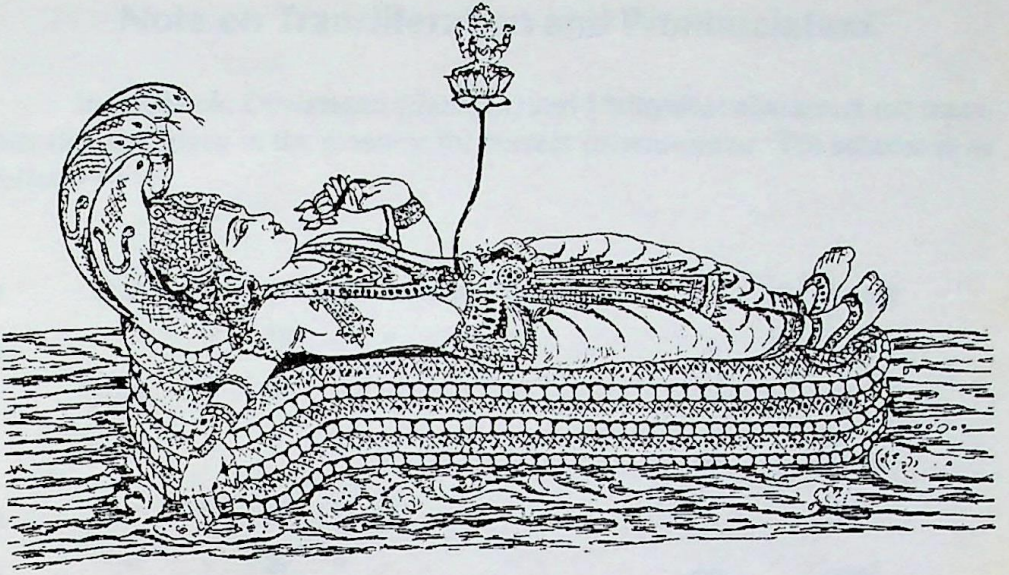
May the book receive excellent acceptance from the readers. We wish continued prosperity to the author of this book and also to the Publishers.

In remembrance of Sree Narayana Bhagavan.

Camp : Coimbatore

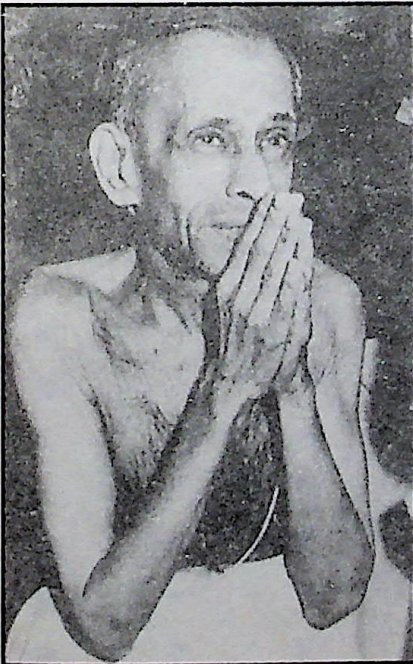
Date : 10-3-'95





ओंकाररूपगमनीयपदारविन्द,  
श्रीवञ्चिभूपकुलदैवत, विश्वरूप ।  
शेषेशयान, शिवपूजनपद्महस्त,  
श्रीपद्मनाभ! मम देहि करावलम्बम् ॥

- Bhagavatheswara Shastry



चित्राटीरान्ववायामृतजलधिसमुद्भूतचिन्ताख्यरत्नं  
क्षत्रालंकारमीडे गरुडरथपदांभोजिनीहंसरत्नम् ।  
चित्रानक्षत्रजातं निखिलजनमनोरञ्जकं वञ्चिधात्री-  
वृत्रारिं श्रीलरामाह्वयमतुलगुणाधारमेधाबलं तम् ॥

- Prof. A.V. Sankaran







## Note on Transliteration and Pronunciation

In this book, Devanagari (Sanskrit) and Malayalam characters are transliterated and given in the glossary for correct pronunciation. The scheme is as follows :-

a	stands for	अ	and sounds like	o	in	come
ā	" "	आ	" "	a	"	far
i	" "	इ	" "	i	"	bit
ī	" "	ई	" "	ee	"	feel
u	" "	उ	" "	u	"	full
ū	" "	ऊ	" "	oo	"	cool
ṛ	" "	ऋ	may be pronounced like	ri	"	ring
e (short)	" "	ए	sounds like	e	"	elephant
ē (long)	" "		" "	a	"	cake
ai (short)	" "	ऐ	" "	i	"	mite
o (short)	" "	ओ	" "	o	"	omit
ō (long)	" "		" "	o	"	oak
au	" "	औ	" "	ou	"	count
ṁ	" "		(anusvāra)	m	"	some
ḥ	" "	-	(visarga) sounds like soft half h			
k	" "	क्	" "	k		
kh	" "	ख्	" "	kh	"	in silk hat (uttered quickly together)
g	" "	ग	sounds like	g	"	go
gh	" "	घ	" "	gh	"	log-hut
ṇ	" "	ङ	" "	ng	"	sing
c	" "	च्	" "	ch	"	church
ch	" "	छ्	" "	chh	"	chruch-hill
ja	" "	ज्	" "	j	"	jug
jh	" "	झ	" "	dgeh	"	hedgehog



n̄	"	"	ज	"	"	"	n	"	singe (burn) (a palatal n)
t	"	"	द	"	sounds like		t	in	curt
th	"	"	ठ	"	"	"	th	"	hot-house
d	"	"	ड	"	"	"	d	"	bird
dh	"	"	ढ	"	"	"	dh	"	red-hot
n	"	"	ण	"	"	"	(cerebral n)		bond
t	"	"	त	"	"	"	t	in	French
th	"	"	थ	"	"	"	th	"	thumb
d	"	"	द	"	"	"	th	"	though
dh	"	"	ध	"	"	"	th	"	breathe hard
n	"	"	न	"	"	"	(dental n)		Pen
p	"	"	प	"	"	"	p	in	pun
ph	"	"	फ	"	"	"	ph	"	top-hat
b	"	"	ब	"	"	"	b	"	bat
bh	"	"	भ	"	"	"	bh	"	abhor
m	"	"	म	"	"	"	m	"	man
y	"	"	य	"	"	"	y	"	young
r	"	"	र	"	"	"	r	"	rust
l	"	"	ल	"	"	"	l	"	lump
v	"	"	व	"	"	"	v or w	"	levy, water
ś	"	"	श्	"	"	"	(palatal s)		
ṣ	"	"	ष्	"	"	"	sh	"	ship
s	"	"	स्	"	"	"	s		sun
h	"	"	ह	"	"	"	h	"	home

### Special to Malayalam

l	"	"	ള	"	"	"	l	"	flower
l	"	"	ഴ	"	"	"	r	"	course
r	"	"	റ	"	"	"	r	"	round
tt	"	"	റ്റ	"	"	"	tt	"	witty
n	"	"	ന	"	"	"	n	"	banana



## CONTENTS

<b>Chapter 1 In Humility .....</b>	<b>(1-8)</b>
Author's Note (1) ■ Acknowledgments (2) ■ Prefatory remarks on the Second Edition (7)	
<b>Chapter 2 Aradhana .....</b>	<b>(9-12)</b>
Invocation (9) ■ Brief notes (11)	
<b>Chapter 3 God's Domain .....</b>	<b>(13-23)</b>
Geographical Location and Affiliated Aspects (13) ■ Ancient City (13) ■ Connected Temples (17) ■ Neighbouring Temples (21)	
<b>Chapter 4 Sthala Puranam .....</b>	<b>(24-28)</b>
The story about the Place (24) ■ Divakara Muni and the Gujarat connection (24) ■ Divakara Muni and the Tulu connection (25) ■ The Pulaya connection (26) ■ Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar and the Namboodiri connection (27)	
<b>Chapter 5 Sunburst of Glory .....</b>	<b>(29-33)</b>
A Special Note (29)	
<b>Chapter 6 The Inner Radiance .....</b>	<b>(34-54)</b>
Spiritual Significance: An Attempt at Analysis (34) ■ Comparison of the human body and the Temple (54)	
<b>Chapter 7 Autograph of Ages .....</b>	<b>(55-201)</b>
Ancient History of the Temple (55) ■ The Royal connections (57) ■ The Rise of the First Chera Empire (59) ■ The Second Chera Empire and its Links of Devotion (61) ■ Venad Rulers (64)	
Medieval History (68) ■ Sangramadheera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (71) ■ Veera Rama Udaya Marthanda Varma (73) ■ Veera Kerala Varma or Veera Kerala Varma Thiruvadi (75) ■ Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma (76) ■ King Veera Iravi Iravi Varma (78) ■ Bharani Thirunal Veera Marthanda Varma or Rama Marthanda Varma (78) ■ Veera Kotha Marthanda Varma (80) ■ Bharani Thirunal Jayasimha Deva II of Venad (81) ■ Veera Iravi Iravi Varma (81) ■ Iravi Adithya Varma (81) ■ Pooruruttathi Thirunal Iravi Iravi Varma (81) ■ Veera Adithya Varma (85) ■ Bhoothala Veera Rama Varma (85) ■ Veera Iravi Varma (86) ■ Kothala Veera Marthanda Varma alias Rama Udaya Marthanda Varma (86) ■ Veera Kerala Varma or Unni Kerala Varma (89) ■ Veera Marthanda Varma or Veera Udaya Marthanda Varma (91) ■ Bhoothala Rama Varma (94) ■ Thrikketta Thirunal Veera Ravi Varma (94) ■ Revathi Thirunal Veera Iravi Iravi Varma (97) ■ Ravi Varma and Adithya Varma (101) ■ Regent Queen Aswathi Thirunal Umayamma Rani (102) ■ Iravi Varma (104) ■ Adithya Varma (106) ■ Unni Kerala Varma (107) ■ Veera Rama Varma (108)	
Modern History (109) ■ Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma (110) ■ Thrippati Danam (121) ■ Thrippati Danam Malayalam Text (122)	



■ Thrippati Danam English Translation (122) ■ Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma (128) ■ Maharaja Avittom Thirunal Bala Rama Varma (140) ■ Ayillyom Thirunal Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi (142) ■ Uthrittathi Thirunal Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi (146) ■ Sree Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma (149) ■ Sree Uthrom Thirunal Marthanda Varma (156) ■ Maharaja Ayillyom Thirunal Rama Varma (158) ■ Maharaja Vishaghom Thirunal Rama Varma (160) ■ Maharaja Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma (163) ■ Pooradam Thirunal Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi (168) ■ Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma (169) ■ Sree Chithira Thirunal as Sree Padmanabha Dasa and Maharaja of Travancore (169) ■ As Padmanabha Dasa and Raj Pramukh in the service of the Temple (171) ■ The Temple Entry Proclamation (174) ■ As Padmanabha Dasa (177) ■ The end of the Old Order (178) ■ Triumph of Devotion (181) ■ Setting Sun (192) ■ Maharaja Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma (195)

## Chapter 8 Milestones of Time ..... (202-211)

**Inscriptions** (202) ■ Trivandrum Inscription of Kodai Marthanda (202) ■ Trivandrum Inscription of Veera Rama Kerala Varma (204) ■ Edanazhi or Vathil Madom Inscription (204) ■ The Belikkal Inscription (205) ■ Namaskara Mandapam Inscription of Sree Krishna shrine-I (205) ■ Namaskara Mandapam Inscription of Sree Krishna shrine-II (205) ■ (Thiruvananthapuram) Inscription of Veera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal (205) ■ Eastern Gopuram Inscription (206) ■ Thiruvampati Perumal shrine Dhvajasthambham Inscription (207) ■ Inscription of Bala Marthanda Varma-I (207) ■ Inscription of Bala Marthanda Varma-II (207) ■ Inscription of Bala Marthanda Varma-III (207) ■ Namaskara Mandapam Inscription (208) ■ Thiru Ampati Inscription-South I (208) ■ Thiruvayambati Inscription-South II (208) ■ Thiruvayambati Inscription-East I (208) ■ Thiru Ampati Inscription-East II (208) ■ Thiru Ampati Inscription-North (209) ■ Inscription of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma (209) ■ The Ottakkal Mandapam Inscription in Gold (209) ■ The Kanyakumari Stone Inscription (210) ■ Thiruvattar Inscription (210) ■ Keralapuram Inscription of Veera Ravi Ravi Varman (210)

## Chapter 9 Legends and Folklore ..... (212-224)

**Narrations** (212) ■ Pulaya connections (212) ■ Sree Hanuman Swamy in the Thiru Ampati Namaskara Mandapam (213) ■ The episode of the ring (214) ■ The Sapta Rishies (214) ■ The King's vision (214) ■ Sree Narasimha Swamy (215) ■ The Kovalam poets (215) ■ The Ghee lamp (216) ■ A prediction (216) ■ Narrations connecting Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma (217) ■ Tarananalloor Namboodiripad and the Sreebhootabeli (220) ■ Sree Narasimha Swamy - Instances of Great Grace (221) ■ Other incidents (222) ■ Events of the recent past (222)

## Chapter 10 Abode of the Divine ..... (225-291)

**Structure, Sculpture, Architecture and Art** (225) ■ Physical Structure, Architecture and Sculpture (228) ■ Kulasekhara Mandapam (240) ■ The Hall of Sculptures (248) ■ Katu-Sarkara-Yogam (264) ■ Cheruchuttu (continued) (267) ■ Panchamayakosas (273) ■ Bronzes (274) ■ Arts (275) ■ Active arts - Music (275) ■ Music during the Alpashi and Painkuni Utsavas (277) ■ Active arts - Arangams (279) ■ Static arts - Murals (285)



## **Chapter 11 Guardians of Temple Tradition ..... (292-296)**

The Tantries of The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple (292) ■ The Tarananalloor Namboodiripads of Irinjalakkuta (292) ■ Sree Parasurama (292) ■ Legends and Accepted Historical Facts (296)

## **Chapter 12 Worship of The Celestial ..... (297-363)**

**Rites, Rituals, Pujas, Festivals** (297) ■ Pushpanjali Swamiyar (298) ■ Tantries (302) ■ Nambies (304) ■ Yogathil Potties (308) ■ Other Aspects (309) ■ Ashtabandham (312) ■ A Traditional Verse (313) ■ Daily routine (314) ■ Sub shrines (321) ■ Sree Agrashala Ganapathy (321) ■ Thevaram of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma (322) ■ Bhadradeepapura (322) ■ Sree Dharmasastha shrine (322) ■ Kshetrapalan shrine (323) ■ Calender of events (323) ■ Monthly events (323) ■ Malayalam month Chingom (324) ■ Ist of Chingom (324) ■ Vinayaka Chathurthi (325) ■ Thiru Onam (325) ■ Ashtami Rohini (326) ■ Uthrom (327) ■ Malayalam month Kanni-Navarathri Puja (327) ■ Maha Ganapathy Homam (327) ■ Moolam (328) ■ Malayalam month Thulam-Utsavam (328) ■ Alpashi Utsavam (328) ■ Anujna (328) ■ Mannuneer Koral (329) ■ Mula Puja and Kalasam (329) ■ Thiruvilakkam (331) ■ Kotiettu (332) ■ Siveli (333) ■ The Ninth day - Palli Vetta (335) ■ The Tenth day - Arat (337) ■ Dravya Kalasam during the Utsavam (341) ■ Malayalam month Vrischikom - Vrischika Chirappu (342) ■ Thrikkarthika (342) ■ Malayalam month Dhanu - Thiruppizhinji (342) ■ Swargavathil Ekadesi (342) ■ Thiruvathira (343) ■ Bhadradeepam (344) ■ Kalabham (345) ■ Malayalam month Makaram-Makara Siveli (345) ■ Perumthiru Amrithu Puja (346) ■ Malayalam month Kumbhom - Sivaratri (347) ■ Malayalam month Meenom - Painkuni Utsavam (347) ■ Sree Rama Navami (348) ■ Uthrom (348) ■ Malayalam month Medom-Vishu (348) ■ Chithira Pournami (349) ■ Malayalam month Idavom, Pal Manga Nivedyam (349) ■ Malayalam month Mithunam - Kalabham (349) ■ Malayalam month Karkkatakam - Karkkataka Siveli (349) ■ Sree Veda Vyasa Jayanthi (349) ■ Perumthiru Amrithu Puja and Kalasam (As in Makaram) (349) ■ Nira and Puthari (349) ■ Murajapam (350) ■ Lakshadeepam (352)

### **Ritualistic aspects of Murajapam and Lakshadeepam (353-363)**

■ The Murajapam Rituals (353) ■ The Lakshadeepam rituals (354) ■ Royal Festivals (355) ■ Thirumudi Kalasam (355) ■ Bhadradeepam (355) ■ Thulapurusha Danam (356) ■ Hiranyagarbha Danam (357) ■ Guide to Worship (359) ■ Timings for Darsanam (359) ■ Vazhipadus in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple (360)

## **Chapter 13 Miracles of The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.. . (364-368)**

Incidents collected from Mathilakam Records (364)

## **Chapter 14 Under the Mantle of Sree Padmanabha Swamy ..... (369-373)**

Socio-Economic and Political Role of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple (369)

## **Chapter 15 Search of Sources ..... (374-430)**

**References in Literature** (374) ■ The Period of the Puranas (375) ■ Varaha Puranam (376) ■ Brahma Puranam (376) ■ Brahmanda Puranam (377) ■ Padma Puranam (378) ■ Skanda Puranam (379) ■ Srimad Bhagavatha Puranam (379) ■ Matsya Puranam (380)



**Tamil Literature** (381) ■ Pathittu Pathu (381) ■ Chilappathikaram (383) ■ Divya Prabandham - Thiruvaymozhi (385) ■ Phala Sruthi (389) ■ Thiruananthai Thalavilasam (389)

**Vintage Literature in other Languages** (390) ■ Samkshepashaareerakam (390) ■ Guru Parampara Prabhavam (391) ■ Keralaachara Deepika (391) ■ Suka Sandesam (392) ■ Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam (392) ■ Sree Ramanujacharya (399) ■ Ramacharitham (400) ■ Anantapuravarnanam (400) ■ Vasumathee Kalyanam (402) ■ Pradyumnabhyudayam (402) ■ Hamsa Sandesam (403) ■ Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma (403) ■ Unnuneeli Sandesam (403) ■ Dasavathara Charitham (406) ■ Leelathilakam (406) ■ Mayura Sandesam (407) ■ Achyutaraayaabhyudayam (407) ■ Chaitanya Charitamrutam (408) ■ Kottayam Kerala Varma (408) ■ Valmiki Ramayanam Translation (408) ■ Padmanabha Keerthanam (409)

**Sree Padmanabha Literature in the Modern Age** (409) ■ Sree Padmanabha Charitham (409) ■ Bhunga Sandesam or Bhramara Sandesam (410) ■ Bala Marthanda Vijayam (411) ■ Padmanabhodayam (411) ■ Sitaraghavam (411) ■ Thullal Kathas of Kunjan Nambiar (412) ■ Vanchippatt and Ramapurathu Warriar (412) ■ The Mathilakam Katha / Mathilakam Pattu (413) ■ Under the banner of Dharmaraja (414) ■ Vasulakshmee Kalyanam (414) ■ Padmanabha Vijayam (414) ■ Alankarabhushanam (415) ■ Chataka Sandesam (415) ■ Bala Rama Bharatham (415) ■ Prince Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma (416) ■ Sree Padmanabha Keerthanam (416) ■ Poothana-moksham (Attakkatha) (417) ■ Sringarasudhakara Bhanam (417) ■ Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma (418) ■ Sanskrit compositions (418) ■ Bhakti Manjari (419) ■ Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabandham (420) ■ Sree Padmanabha Satakam (421) ■ Ghattiyam (421) ■ Manipravalam Literature (422) ■ Other Works (423) ■ Irayimman Thampi (424) ■ Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuram (424) ■ A.R. Raja Raja Varma Koil Thampuram (425) ■ Narasimha Bharathi Swamigal (425)

**Contemporary Writers** (425) ■ Tulasivanam (425) ■ Prof. A.V. Sankaran (427) ■ Dr. Sambasivan (427) ■ Dr. V.S. Sharma (428) ■ A Stuti of Sree Padmanabha (428) ■ Maharani Karthika Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi (429) ■ Maharaja Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma (430) ■ Punartham Thirunal Sreekumara Varma (430)

## **Chapter 16 In Majestic Slavery ..... (431-437)**

■ The Institution of Sree Padmanabha Dasas (431)

**Sree Padmanabha ! Poem..... (438)**

**Calender of Important Events ..... (439-440)**

**Glossary and Transliteration ..... (441-478)**

**Index ..... (479-488)**



# 1 IN HUMILITY

A way of saying  
behaving that you  
show the my  
do not are  
that you are  
better in  
imagination  
people

Words prove elusive when I strive to transcribe in these pages, the emotions that flood my heart for the decree from Above that I write this submission of devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. From time immemorial He reigned as the Supreme Arbiter of our collective dynastic destiny and as our hearts' Beloved. This inevitable and inalienable bondage has been of such magnitude that the ancient *Dasa* family of Travancore royalty possesses no identity independent of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. As such, a journey into the evolution of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple of today's Thiruvananthapuram which has consistently defied *the dust and decay* of the mighty march of ages, has been a deeply rewarding, sublimely exhilarating experience for me. I am exceedingly grateful to my Swamy, ever so grateful.

Other than the benediction of God, the initial motivation of this volume is Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore who was my dearly loved maternal uncle. Few and far between are the births of such divine souls whose visitation on earth represents divinity in its physical aspect. His love was the light and protection that enveloped us of his family and which continues to beacon our fates. What we owe to him rises beyond the elastic limitations of language. I felt that even at this late hour, the best expression of love and gratitude to my uncle for everything he was, is and will ever be in my residual life, was to write on the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and its presiding Deity in whom the Maharaja breathed and lived in total dedication. Thus this book took form, fragrance and colour as an offering of thanksgiving to my uncle, encompassing within its pages a part of my being. If one looks carefully into these leaves, perhaps one will see the march of history, wafted on the perfume of memories and of shades of smiles and sighs which are all



imprinted within it, superimposed by the unheard beat of the heart that whispers 'Padmanabha, Padmanabha.'

Apart from being one of the most important temples of the State, the many unique features that are its birthright set the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple on a special pedestal of magnificence. Suspended as it were betwixt time and space, its credentials of antiquity are underwritten by milestones of centuries which stand as unmoving witnesses to history in the making. Its ancient age and acknowledged standing on the religious map of India apart, the infusion of royalty has consequently endowed the Temple with yet another distinct role. This seems to be the only known instance, in world history, of a Deity becoming the constitutional head of a State, not only by emotional submission of the rulers but by legal sanction and official political recognition. Travancore had undoubtedly been fortunate to be the heir to such a spiritual legacy.

The dimensions of the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy are indeed of awesome magnitude necessitating considerable research and in-depth study. To the best of my capacity, I have worked. What started as a labour of love continues thus reaping the richest of rewards. I am more than content. At the same time I am aware that oversights and lapses, even though unintentional, will surely surface. Both merits and demerits I place in all humility and with profound apology at the sacred feet of my Master, Sree Padmanabha Swamy. It is His grace and my uncle's blessings that motivated the pen; the fruit also is Theirs.

While going through the pages of this book, a criticism may surface that an over-projection has been given to the Royal Family to which I belong. By way of explanation, it is submitted here that from very long back, the Temple and the Throne were inextricably inter-linked. Maximum care has been taken to restrict the role of the rulers to their services to this Temple. Due to emotional nuances, should transgressions creep in, they may kindly be pardoned.

In this monumental venture I remain deeply indebted to many individuals and institutions. The help thus derived made it possible for me to complete this work in the existing form. Since the list of names is lengthy I am forced to constrain myself to the absolutely unavoidable; their omission would amount to grave injustice I do to myself.

My humble prostrations to Jagadguru Sree Sankaracharya Sree Sree Bharathi Teertha Maha Sannidhanam of Sree Sringeri Peetham for bestowing on this work his most valued blessings through the sacred *Sreemukham*.<sup>1</sup> My pranamas

---

1. '*Sreemukham*' – words/message from an exalted, spiritual personage



to Sree Potti Swami (Sree Subramoniam Potti) of Sree Pazhanchira Devi Temple, Thiruvananthapuram and to Swami Sree Satyananda Saraswathi Thiruvadigal of Sree Ramadasa Mission, Chenkottukonam, for their spiritual inspiration.

It may not be the accepted format to acknowledge one's own family at the outset. I am doing so as it is their co-operation and support that enabled me to work on this volume. To my mother, Maharani Lakshmi Bayi, to whom I remain ever indebted, to my younger uncle Maharaja Marthanda Varma for his guiding hand from chapter to chapter and for his invaluable suggestions, to my husband Sri R.R. Varma of Paliakkara Western Palace, Thiruvalla, who put up with my in and out of season bouts of prolonged pen work, also aiding in the proof correction and without whose patience this book would have lapsed into long delay and to the other members of my family, particularly my elder sister Princess Gouri Parvathi Bayi, the children included for their stoic backing, a very big love-filled 'Thank you' to each and everyone of them.

Many are the scholars and professors whose expertise and knowledge were made freely available to me. To Brahmasree Mithran Namboodiripad and Sri P.R. Rama Varma Raja of Kanjiramattom Palace, Poonjar, to Dr. M. Sambasivan, Sri Padmanabha Sharma, Sri Rishymangalam Vasudevan Potti and Sri Karamana M.H. Shastri with their in-depth grasp of religion, to Sri K.C. Shankaranarayan I.A.S. (Retd.) and to Professor S. Guptan Nair, Dr. V.S. Sharma and Mrs. Bindu Sasibhooshan I remain most obliged. I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Puthusseri Ramachandran for his unfailing support and help. To my cousin Dr. R.P. Raja of Utsavamadhom Palace, Mavelikkara and Sree Kizhakkaimathom Govindan Nair, my thanks for their valuable contributions especially on history. I render my thanks to the five past Executive Officers of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, Sri S.V. Krishna Iyer, Lt. Col. A.P. Kanthy, Major K.S. Thampi, Lt. Col. G.T. Thampi and Sri N.S. Nair for the significant insight into their timeslots which formed, solid background for the recent past including the highly sensitive period of transition during Col. Kanthy's tenure. I particularly thank Col. Kanthy for the many hours he put in educating me on so many aspects of extreme importance. My sincere thanks are due to Mrs. Bala Gopinathan Nayar for her continuous help in hastening collection and transmission of details.

The Tarananalloor Namboodiripads of Irinjalakkuta have been the hereditary *Tantries* of this great Temple. They have, with considerable forbearance, repeatedly cleared my doubts and imparted much knowledge especially about many of the little-known aspects of worship carried out here and all inter-



related issues. Without their willing guidance, it would not have been possible to make real headway into specified vital areas. To Tantries Sarvasree Govindaru Padmanabharu, Parameswaru Parameswaru, Ramaru Neelakantaru and Ramaru Govindaru Namboodiripads I place on record my respectful gratitude.

The *Mooppil Swamiyar*,<sup>2</sup> Sree Krishnadasa Vasudeva Brahmananda Teertha of *Munchira Madhom* and the *Random Mura Swamiyar*,<sup>3</sup> Sree Melppoyilathu Ashtamoorthi Bharathikal of Thrissur *Naduvil Madhom*, the *Pushpanjali Swamiyars* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the *Periya Nambi Sabharam Raman Umeshan* and the former *Panchagavyathu Nambi Gokarnam Vasudevan* have all provided extremely significant material. So also Sri Neelakanthan Nair, who as part and parcel of this Temple due to his intimate association with it from the age of eighteen to the present seventy odd years, has been a valuable source of factual reference. I remain deeply beholden to all of them.

Mrs. Rose Mariarputham, Miss. C.S. Chandralekha and Sri S. Parameswaran Nair, Administrator of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Trust have also extended sincere help to me in checking the manuscripts thoroughly which they did with painstaking care. A very big 'Thank you' to them for lightening the load of my work considerably.

It will be remiss on my part if I do not recognise and thank Smt. P. Leela Bai, Director of the Archives Department, Smt. P.S. Radha Devi, Director of the Department of Archaeology, Dr. K. Vijayan, Director, University Manuscript Library, officers of the University Library, Thiruvananthapuram and their respective staff as well as the Principal and librarians of the Sanskrit College.

To Sri Rajan of Maharaja Studio, Thiruvananthapuram whose camera captured the majority of photographs in an outpouring of dedication devoid of commercial approach, I register my deep indebtedness. I am also thankful to my uncle Sree Padmanabha Dasa Uthradom Thirunal, son Adithya Varma and Sri Sooryanarayanan for some of the photographs contained within. My thanks are also extended to Sri Vikraman Nair who willingly undertook the task of typing the piles of handwritten documents.

To the staff of Akshara Graphix, the printers of this book, I convey my thanks for the efforts put in at personal and professional levels and the pains taken in the careful execution of the work. I also thank

2. *Mooppil Swamiyar* – Senior Swamiyar

3. *Random Mura* – Second in seniority (രണ്ടാം മുറ)



Sri N. Ravindranathan Thampi, Retd. Head Reader of Govt. Presses for his valuable assistance in bringing out the book.

Artists Rajendran of 'Canvas', Appukuttan Achari of Bangalore and R. Viswanathan of the State Archaeology Department have enhanced the value of this work with their fine sketches. I offer them my thanks.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, is the Publisher. I am indeed most grateful that an institution of the Bhavan's elevated standing has come forward to bring out this book under its banner of prestige. To the Bhavan, and in particular to its General Editor Sri S. Ramakrishnan and to its Joint Editor Sri T.D. Parameswar, my most sincere thanks for their unfailing consideration.

I place on record my deep debt of thankfulness to Dr. A.G. Menon for so generously and willingly making available for me his thesis *History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758*. I have banked heavily on it and in many places it has ironed out the path for me to proceed further. A veritable treasurehouse with regard to this Temple, its worth to me can never be underestimated. I thank him over and over again for this tremendous help.

My special thanks to Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon for instructing me to structure the book and on how to proceed. It was he who gave me the layout of the masterplan at a time when I was totally lacking in experience and who guided me whenever required in the chapters relating to history.

I remain most beholden to Prof. A.V. Sankaran for his exceedingly valuable help and personal kindness to me. His tireless participation in my work especially in the complex chapter dealing with the literary evolution of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, as well as in the overall correction cannot be ever forgotten. With depth of sincerity I offer him my unreserved thanks for being a perennial source of encouragement to me.

Prof. M.G. Sasibhooshan's services have been of inassessable worth in the formation of this volume and have been reflected in many a chapter. From the outset, whenever and wherever required they were readily available in ample measure which included finding answers to my endless queries and accompanying me on fact-finding missions. His positive outlook was a real strength to me. I have no words to express my gratitude to him.

Prof. P. Balakrishnan Nair has made time amidst many commitments to repeatedly go through the initial written material with meticulous care and concentration, adopting a system of considerate correction by which the style of writing did not face transformation. Many are the hours he has patiently devoted to me for the different sections of the manuscript enriching it with his



experience. Without his accepting the responsibility of this difficult task, the emergence of the finished book would have become far more complicated. I remain most obliged to him and offer him my grateful thanks.

Col. K. Gopinathan Nayar, the present Executive Officer of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, readily made available for me time and again the priceless *Mathilakam* Records and manuals held in his custody. At many instances he himself provided me with much essential material. His help was considerable and continuous in proof reading and verifying the accuracy of my laborious work. My heartfelt recurring thanks to him for accepting my flow of demands on his time and energy and for making it possible for the book to make gratifying progress.

Last but not least, I inscribe my most sincere appreciation and particular thanks to Sri T. Ravindran Thampi I.A.S. (Retd.) for his yeoman services in the evolution of this work whether it be in the area of data collection or in the exacting work of proof correction. The hours he has expended on this task and his unfailing patience and significant suggestions have been of tremendous help and are most gratefully and repeatedly acknowledged.

To the countless number of persons from varied walks of life ranging from acclaimed scholars and luminaries to common folk who have expectedly and unexpectedly contributed towards the creation of this book and whose services remain solid, to one and all, my deepest appreciation and eternal gratitude. Without their concerted efforts this volume would have remained suspended in the realm of dreams.

From every quarter I have been enlightened and encouraged by the strength of kindness and support. The tangible experience of the grace of God and the blessings of my uncle Sree Chithira Thirunal which kept me company throughout this sublime journey are something incredible. While my hand held the pen, it was that combined Force that motivated it into movement. As such, revealing fabulous and undreamt of dimensions, this book has been akin to a pilgrimage to the Abode of the Divine, the sanctum of sanctity to which our collective destiny is forever grappled in beloved bondage. It is futile to attempt to condense and compress the heartbeats of generations into sixteen chapters or some hundred pages, so let them convert as hymns to the glory of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, as ongoing melody of emotional adoration that soft circumambulates Him down through the great and uncharted spans of centuries.



## Prefatory Remarks on the Second Edition

I reverentially render my eternal gratitude to Sree Padmanabha Swamy at whose lotus feet I had submitted the initial narration of His great abode on earth, for His sanction of a second edition. As solid manifestation of His divine grace, in many an instance fresh inputs reached me from expected and unexpected sources, delighting me at the same time filling my heart with awe and my eyes with unshed tears of many-toned emotions.

I recollect with nostalgia and longing my illustrious uncle Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma the love for whom continues to inspire my endeavours. To him I remain ever indebted.

Exceptional indeed has been the role of Kumari C.S. Chandralekha in the context of proof reading, spell checking, ensuring uniformity of words and in dealing with non-English terms which are unavoidably in abundance. Herself a committed devotee of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, this taxing work became a labour of love to her. She has put her heart and soul in it, pouring over letter and page not once but repeatedly with uncompromising zeal, in her desire for perfection to what extent possible. The effort she has put in is truly tremendous. I am at a loss for words to convey my gratitude to her.

In a spontaneous gesture of consideration to me, Prof. K. Sankaran Nampoothiry managed to create time from his overburdened schedule to go through the proof for correction whenever or where ever it was called for. The Professor is a well known figure in the literary circles, his linguistic scholarship covering both English and Malayalam. The advantage of his involvement became compounded due to his thorough grasp of the subject matter as he had translated the first edition into Malayalam, with Sri Jayakumar IAS adding that special poetic touch all of his own with his translation of the opening poem. I offer my sincere thanks to Prof. Sankaran Nampoothiry for so painstakingly carrying out this work.

While new information sought me out from various quarters I feel compelled to record my deep appreciation to Capt. G. Gopalakrishnan Nair (Retd.) who is my daughter-in-law Gopika's father and to Dr. E. Eswaran Nampoothiry for the vital details they provided me with, concerning the consecration of Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Swamy and Thekkaidathu

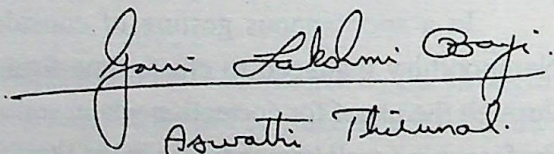


Sree Narasimha Swamy respectively. Their inclusion in this volume has enhanced its worth in solid measure. In addition Dr. Nampoothiry took great care to check the transliterated terms added at the end of this book. I remain most beholden to them.

I continue to be deeply obliged to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and in particular to its General Secretary and Executive Director Sri. S. Ramakrishnan, for their unreserved support of my efforts. I have to also thank Smt. Rajalakshmi Madhusudanan and M/s. Akshara Graphix who have been responsible for this volume too, for their commendable execution of this work. To Sri. T. Ravindran Thampi IAS (Retd.), Palace Secretary, and to Col. K. Gopinathan Nayar (Retd) who is once again in the saddle as the Executive Officer of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, I express my sincere gratitude for the help they have time and again extended to me.

Lastly I thank the various institutions and members of the general public here and overseas for their valuable patronage of the first edition of '*Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple*' which has led to its reprint.

For the undersigned however, this work once again takes on the nature of '*Vaikuntha Priya Darsanam*.'

  
Aswathi Thirunal.



## 2

# ARADHANA

### Invocation

Oh ! You of infinite expansions  
Vishnu! Omnipresent One  
Reigning in total supremacy  
In mighty atom indivisible  
And creation's complexity alike  
Absolute, complete, containing all  
Yet contained by none, ever free,  
Obeisance to You.

Padmanabha, as You recline  
On coiled charge of Infinity  
Your couch of power concentrate  
By Yogic trance, Supreme One command  
Rhythm of universes, their life-breath true.  
Known and unknown stratas and spheres,  
Solar systems and milky ways  
Lunar orbits, heavenly frames  
In awesome patterns form, reform  
Within the might of Your mystic will.

Padmanabha! Grand-Master supreme!  
By dynamic will You activate  
World orders and their endless march,  
You curtail by time, Oh! timeless One;



Cosmic womb You contain with ease,  
 The cord of creation, the Kundalini,  
 From sacred Bindu spirals up  
 To bloom as the lotus in extrovert mood.  
 Peak potent petals play patterns of life  
 Of Karmic graphs that evolve, dissolve  
 As many-petalled flower unfolds to receive  
 Creation of Creator, Brahma Himself.

Soft lulled by waves of eternity of  
 The Ocean of Milk of 'Sattva' pure  
 Unsullied, pristine, perpetually white,  
 You control the elements, senses at play;  
 That bow in submissive service to you  
 In serpentine might of the Endless One  
 Adorned by glory of Your recumbent form.

Narayana! acme of purity, refuge  
 Superfine beams of inexpressible bliss  
 Emanate and flow from Your body of light  
 As nectar of life, as wisdom Supreme  
 As axle of mankind amalgamate,  
 Fate, Karma Your two-way breath subtle  
 Oh! Paramount Power the celestials worship.

Yet;

To me, my soul's thrill, Divine Delight  
 So, 'midst Karmic disciplines, throes of the world  
 In cosmic confusion, command and control  
 Great Patriarch at Your adored feet,  
 This homage of humble blooms I place,  
 Not those which sprouted in yesterday's rain  
 Nor destined to wither in tomorrow's sun  
 Gathered from a tree hoary with age.

Pray pause awhile, rest, rest in my heart  
 Which throbs and thirsts in its love of You  
 Not youthful love but centuries old  
 That flows in the blood, beats in the pulse  
 And holds hands in romance with time itself.



## Brief notes

From the sublime spheres of Omnipotent majesty and might of mysticism that vibrate through the entire calendar of creation, to the humble beat of an individual heart, that scale may appear too startling in contrast at the outset. But if one thinks about it deeply one would perhaps agree that the cosmic electricity receives and merges within it, the individual-charged currents which thus return to their point of origin and become one with it.

Vishnu — Literally 'He of *Vyapta*' or expansion indicative of the character of omnipresence.

Coiled charge of Infinity — *Ananta*, the serpent King representing infinity and the *Kundalini Shakti*.

Yogic trance — 'Sree Padmanabha Swamy' in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram is visualised as being in *Yoga Nidra* or *Yogic* slumber on *Ananta*.

Cosmic womb — The navel is in the central point of the body and the stalk of the lotus which opens as the seat of the Creator, starts from there earmarking that area as the cosmic womb.

The cord of creation — Like the umbilical cord, the stalk of creation rises up from the navel of the Lord. In literal translation 'Padmanabha' means 'One who has the Padmam or lotus rising from the Nabhi or navel.' This stalk on which the first flower of creation, the 'Lotus', blooms, is also identified with the great cosmic Kundalini or collective Kundalini of all creation.

Sacred *Bindu* — The navel or the mystic indivisible point from which all later divisions arise, (though not to be confused with the 'Sacred *Bindu*' located just below the *Sahasraram*, the seat of nectar). Buddhist belief holds that the Kundalini resides in the Manipura Chakram near the navel.

Lotus in extrovert mood — The Lotus atop the human brain is in the inverted form charging the inner structure of man and so characterised as being in an 'introverted mood', if one were to rely on poetic expression. The lotus blooming from the '*Bindu*' is in the normal position, opening outwardly as here its function is not to radiate inward energy like the inverted lotus atop the brain in 'introvert mood' but to emit outward currents. Hence the extrovert mood.

Peak potent petals of life — These petals mirror the extrovert and introvert expressions of super-charged energy of 'peak potency' illustrating 'Cosmic' and '*Karmic*' disciplines. They underscore the creation and dissolution principles connecting the individual and the universal self. This can be



diagrammatically picturised as the pattern of creation in the form of what evolves as the *Sudarsana Chakram* in its finished stage.

Many petalled flower — It denotes not the literal number of thousand petals but numberlessness. *Sahasram Vai Sarvam*, 'Thousand' equates with multiplicity.

Creation of Creator — The Creator, Brahma Himself manifested in the centre of this Lotus, which thus became the seat of creation of the Creator.

You control the elements — Endless One — The elements are the *Pancha Bhootas* (earth, sky, air, water and fire) and the senses are the *Panchendriyas* (nose, eyes, ears, tongue and skin). The five hoods of Ananta on whose form the Lord rests are equated with the five elements, or five senses (which are finally contained in the five elements). These hoods are raised and held over the head of the Lord like an umbrella and stand in an attitude of service to Him. The Endless One in this context is, of course, *Ananta* or *Adi Sesa* or eternity itself.

As nectar of Life... amalgamate — The term '*Narayana*' has three common interpretations, *Nara* from which the term is fashioned means 'water', 'collective humanity', 'wisdom' and in full expansion as the basis or axle of mankind, as its *Kundalini* power. Hence 'Nectar of life' is water but not in the ordinary sense of the term — it is the *Jeeva Jalam* or *Prana Jalam* or aqua of existence which was present at the very start of creation. 'Wisdom Supreme' conveys total and complete enlightenment. 'Axle of mankind Amalgamate' is the unsplit form of the term '*Narayana*'. Superseding all these elaborations this term is indicative of the flow of electromagnetic radiation denoting the character of cosmic effulgence in its pre-creation stage.

'*Not those which sprouted.... tree hoary with age*' — ('The tree' is the family tree. Historians hold the view that the Travancore Royal Family numbers as one of the oldest Royal houses in India). This offering is not the emotional submission to and adoration of the author alone but that of her family also whose blood flows saturated with devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. She prays that it would continue thus for the unborn generations too of the family of *Sree Padmanabha Dasa*, as long as the Sun, the Moon and the Stars shine.



### 3

## GOD'S DOMAIN

### Geographical Location and Affiliated Aspects

Uill the re-organisation of States of the Indian Union by the Government of India in 1956, Travancore was the southernmost State of India with the Sahyadri range of the Western Ghats on the eastern side and washed by the waves of the Arabian Sea on the western side and the waters of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea on the southern tip forming boundaries crafted by nature herself. This isolation provided by these natural barriers protected the State to some extent from external influences and aided in preserving its pristine purity and cultural sanctity and enabled the land to bask in the blessings of peace as well. But this does not mean that it enjoyed total insular status as it too had its fair share of attacks. From early times it suffered the repeated advances and attacks of the Tamil kings of the powerful Chola and Pandya dynasties and Vijayanagaram in their desire of conquest and rule of this lavishly enchanting area. Though in rare cases fortune was lenient to them, they were never successful in fully consolidating and establishing total supremacy over this State or absorbing it as part of their empires. Much later, on the time scale, a chieftain of Muslim stock termed Mukilan came right up to Manacaud, close to the Fort area where the Temple is located, during the reign of Umayamma Rani between 1677 and 1684 AD but was routed finally with the help of Kottayam Kerala Varma. Travancore stood witness to the attack of the Dutch force which came by sea, in the Battle of Colachel on 10th of August 1741 AD during the reign of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma and also to the Mysore advances led first by Hyder Ali and then twice by his son Tippu Sultan during the reign of Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma. These attempts ended in the defeat of the enemy by the supreme grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Still, by and large, this State was able to



retain its character and individuality which was made possible by its protected position of advantage, contributing to its unquestioned prosperity.

This land is abundantly blessed by nature, rich in fertile soil with ample water resources, minerals, spices, forest wealth, tea, cash crops etc. There are no harsh extremes of climate and rainfall is sufficient. Waterways were vital links in areas of transport and commerce and one name of the land – 'Vanchi Nadu' or 'Vanchi Rajya' (the land of boats) – highlights the significance of the water systems. The capital of this land has been for long a city of documented antiquity, today's Thiruvananthapuram, the successor of many other names all connecting in one way or the other with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

*Anantankatu* or forest of Ananta, the snake chief and close attendant of Sree Padmanabha Swamy seems to be one of the earliest labels of identification bestowed on this area in folk-lore. Some scholars point out that since the Temple has undoubted earlier existence, the other names of this city would possess greater age. It is well known that 'bliss' is synonymous with '*Brahman*' as is emphasised by the declaration *Aanando Vai Brahma*. The terms *Syanandoora Puri* or *Syanandoorapuram* – the city of Maha Vishnu (whose one name is *Aananda* or bliss which is *Brahmam*) or "the City of Bliss" itself, have appeared in the works of early origin and have re-surfaced much later on also<sup>1</sup> as *Syanandoorapuram* – the city where bliss or *Brahmam* is within reach as sung by the sages. This is supported by the Tulu Brahmin author of *Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam* (4269 Kali Year). He states that the place came to be known as *Syanandoora* as the ancient sages considered *Aananda* or transcendental bliss not far off from this city. It also bore the name *Aanandapuram* (meaning same as above) which in course of time got abbreviated to *Anandapuram* and this later on became *Anantapuram* or *Anantasayana Nagari* both meaning the city of *Ananta* or the city of the one who reclines on *Ananta* – Padmanabha. The prefix '*Thiru*' got added on at a later stage.

Linguistic evolution interprets the name and concludes that initially the place would have been known as Sree Anantapuram (for obvious reasons). A good number of terms have descended to Malayalam from Sanskrit through *Prakrit* and *Syanandoorapura* is an example in point. In *Prakrit* the initial *Sree* changed to *Si a*. In reversion to Sanskrit as per rules of grammar *Si-a* becomes *Sya*. Owing to the principles of Syncope *a* and *p* (अ) are dropped and by complementary change *u* (उ) becomes *oo* (ऊ) thus giving the form *Syanandoorapura*.

1. In the stone inscription in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the city is referred to as *Syanandoorapura*. "*Syanandooraiika Gostalaya Kamaledrisai Godamarthanda Colambadise Chakravarthi*" — T.A.S. Volume III, page 50.



Like a priceless jewel of unsurpassed brilliance, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple rests in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram in the old, walled Fort area. According to some scholars this is considered to be the oldest inhabited region in South India. This demarcated enclosed area also housed many sacred tanks or *Teerthas* (holy water sources) of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, numerous other temples, centres of learning and religious instruction as well as places for free food distribution, buildings to accommodate the *Tantries*, scholars, artists and individuals of note, the many palaces, residences of the aristocratic Kshatriya families hailing from other areas of the State and so on. A concentration of Namboodiri, Tamil and Tulu Brahmin, Kshatriya and upper caste Hindu population was very much in evidence here. The whole area was made very beautiful with many gardens (maintained for Temple use) and well laid out avenues flanked with mighty trees which sheltered a variety of birds including rare species. Cleanliness of public places featured high on priority. Granaries operated to store the different types of paddy required for the use of the Temple. The charming old *Nel-pura* (granary) near the Sree Vettakkorumakan Temple is a fine example of traditional architecture and exists to this day in a state of reasonable preservation.

From Thiruvananthapuram itself we can perceive the mountainous highland, the coastal strip and the central flatlands which all form part of it. The landmark that is the Agastyakutam Peak, more than 2000 metres high, stands etched against the horizon with the Western Ghats extending on either side of it, providing a feast to the eyes. Sage Agastya after whom this peak is named and who has highly significant connections with this Temple is said to have sat on top of this hill, which also goes by the name of Pothikai Malai in Tamil, wherefrom he propounded the first grammar in Tamil. Avalokitheswara, the Divinity of Tantric Buddhism, has his seat on this hill. In those early days, from the flag staff of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which falls in line with the centre of the sanctum, up to the Western Ghats, there unravelled a straight and fantastic view without any obstruction in the form of buildings or even trees coming in between, if the eyes were powerful enough to traverse that distance.

The Karamana and Killiyar (Kochar) rivers merge as the Thiruvallom river, as they flow through this city. The Thiruvallom river and the *Pithru Teertham* of Thiruvallom Temple were connected to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as its *Teerthas*. The number of *Teerthas* of this Temple vary in geographical location extending up to Varkala, in different texts, though seven or more are common in all. The *Padma Teertham*, the tank attached directly to the Temple, is undoubtedly the most famous of all. The *Chakra Teertham* on the Sanghumukhom Beach is also an appendage to this Temple and the name of the beach is a clear indication of its ties with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy



Temple. The *Arat* Procession of the Deities has been taking place on this beach front from unrecorded times. The ancient stone dam constructed on Killiyar river known as the Marutankuzhi Dam stands to this day. A canal commonly known as Kochar was also made to carry water to the Temple tank which boasted of a perfect inlet and outlet system and to irrigate the Nandavanam gardens where flowers were grown for the Temple, to the Temple plantations and for the numerous cows maintained for the Temple purposes. Cow sheds were erected specially for these cows. On the sides of the broad pathways leading to the Temple, big granite troughs are seen in which water was stored for the cows to drink.

The city was the meeting point of many of the important highways like the ones linking Kollam, Thovala and Ambasamudram (in Thirunelveli District) to the capital. The near perfect system of irrigation was the pride of the city with well-built inlets and outlets and till some were blocked up very much later in modern times, Thiruvananthapuram was a stranger to floods. The enchanting backwaters here finally move on to merge with the majestic Arabian Sea.

As one faced the east, the emerald green lush paddy fields stretched for miles and miles. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple exerted ownership on them. Different types of rice, including certain special qualities<sup>2</sup> were obtained from them. The Putharikkandom Maitanam, which is today used for public purposes, was originally a vast field growing the rice as the name itself indicates. The Temple lands were commonly known as *Sree Pandaravakai* or those belonging to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Easy availability of raw stones like bricks, hard stones, clay, as well as a variety of good wood contributed to the growth of a flourishing trade in modelling in clay, in wood and granite carving and engraving on stones, which in turn found a platform for display of expertise in the nerve centre of the city, in the Temple itself. Articles in in-lay work in metals of brass, copper etc. in the form of the exquisitely decorated lamps of all types and vessels, *Puja* utensils and fine work in precious metals such as gold, silver, ivory etc. for ornaments and other needs for the Temple all found a berth here. Weavers of gold-lace cloth, goldsmiths and other master craftsmen thrived under royal patronage along with learned men in every field, artists and musicians. Personalities of religious standing were received with much respect here and were always welcome.

Trees like coconut, jack, mango and arecanut which have special significance with this Temple's rituals and a vast variety of other trees abounded in this city. In the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, one of main *Nivedyas*, (offering of

---

2. *Navara rice*.



food) continues to be a salted mango in the original coconut shell which was first used by Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar when he made his initial offering to the Lord in Anantankatu. This coconut shell is now covered with gold for preservation purposes. It is said that only in Kerala is the wood of the jack tree used for the carving of idols for Temple worship. Arecanut is normally given to the priests as part of the *Dakshina* (or gifts for religious service).

As a great devotional experience, as a famed pilgrim centre, as an extremely prosperous place of trade and commerce supporting skilled craftsmen, as a meeting point of excellence in religious, scholastic and artistic ability, as a lauded seat of educational, devotional and martial training (*Kandalloor Salai* near Valia Chalai) and temple of learning, as a place of enchanting scenic beauty including the stunning array of trees and plants inhabited by a wide variety of sweet-throated birds, the city of Sree Padmanabha Swamy basked in great repute. To quote the words of Dr. A.G. Menon in his thesis *History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758*, "*Trivandrum must have been one of the oldest and famous centres of pilgrimage on account of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This is emphatically proved by some literary compositions of the 13th and 14th centuries. The present day city of Trivandrum appears to be the gradual growth of the Temple premises, proportionate to the spread of the fame of the Temple.*" (Literature dealing much further back also is found about this Temple).

The ancient walled city which embraced the throb and beat of the State of Travancore - the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple - is appropriately known as *Kottakkakam* or 'inside the Fort'. The walls of the Fort were constructed by Maharaja Marthanda Varma the Great in 924 ME/1749 AD.<sup>3</sup> The mud required for it was obtained from the fields on payment of compensation. The walls seen today are made up of granite on certain sides, brick and mortar on the front side and mud on the northern side. The mud wall has been held by many as a constructional feat as it illustrated the expertise that enabled a mud wall to rise so high and to withstand weather and time without other consolidating aids. Originally the front wall too was granite but it was demolished by the British Government after the uprising of Velu Thampi Dalava so as to lessen the security, in an act of retribution. (It is lamentable that a good portion of this historic mud wall was demolished some years ago).

## Other Temples

### 1. Connected temples

Though seemingly a deviation it might prove to be of interest to pause and glance at some among the numerous temples situated either at adjacent locations or measuring long distances which had direct or vicarious ties with the

3. *Mathilakam Records - Churuna 30, Ola 70 - Year 924 ME/1749 AD.*



Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This is not to be wondered at when the holistic position this Temple commanded on the canvas of the land is taken into consideration. The Tantries of this Temple, the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads of Irinjalakkuta village, were commonly the Tantries in many a major *Devasthanam* of the State, their religious authority embracing a geographical area of impressive extent. To name just a few are Sree Sthanumalaya Perumal Temple of Suchindrom, Sree Bhagavathy Temple of Sharkara, Sree Sreevallabha Temple of Thiruvalla, Sree Mahakshetra of Thuravoor, Sree Koodalmanikyam Bharata Temple of Irinjalakkuta and Sree Lakshmana Swamy Temple of Moozhikkulam. Though in some of these centres of worship there has been a change of Tantries, many continue as before. Even in certain smaller temples like the Sree Navaneethakrishna Temple of Neyyatinkara and Sree Saraswathi Amman Temple of Padmanabhapuram, they have occupied this position possibly due to the pronounced royal connections of Venad with them. It may be recollected that the Sree Krishna Swamy Temple of Neyyatinkara was an offering of thanksgiving by Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma and that the idol of Sree Saraswathi Amman was entrusted to the then *Kulasekhara Perumal* for ensuring correct conduct of worship centuries ago, by sage Kambar.

In the context of connected temples, Thiruvallom and Thrippadapuram (Thrippappoor) gain extra importance. During the initial *Darsanam* to Vilvamangalam, Sree Padmanabha Swamy's massive form stretched out eighteen *Yojanas* with His head positioned at Thiruvallom, body being borne by Thiruvananthapuram and feet resting at Thrippadapuram. The Sree Parasurama Kshetram (as it is known now) of Thiruvallom joins the *Alpashi Utsavam Arat* procession of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple with its two Deities - Sree Maha Vishnu (as Parasurama) and Sree Parameswara - on elephant back, mostly riding separately but at times on a single elephant. Sree Maha Vishnu of Thrippadapuram used to be present for both *Alpashi* and *Painkuni Arats* but unfortunately, due to certain factors this Deity has ceased to be associated with the ceremony. But on more counts than one this break in tradition is lamented. Other than Thiruvallom, the temples accompanying the *Alpashi Arat* procession are the Sree Maha Vishnu Temples at Sree Cheriya Udayaneswaram and Sree Vadivethu as also the Devi of Sree Arakothu. Similar to that of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the consecration of the last mentioned Temple too is attributed to Vilvamangalam to whom goes the credit of establishing many a temple in Kerala, especially in the Travancore region. In the *Painkuni Arat* procession, Sree Maha Vishnu (as Sree Varahamoorthy) of Sree Sreevaraham Temple, Sree Krishna Swamy of Sree Eruveli (ഇരുവേലി) Temple and Sree Maha Vishnu (as Sree Vamanamoorthy) of Sree Thrivikramangalam Temple are also present. The *Arat* rituals of all the



participating temples too take place in the Arabian Sea that evening and they proceed back to the Fort along with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple procession.

The links with the adjacent Anantankatu Sree Nagaraja Temple, outside the Western walls of the Temple, require no elaboration, the awesome *Darshanam* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy reclining on the serpent king Ananta having been in this area, which was identified even before this event as the forest of Ananta.

The sacred *Padma Teertham* carries within its railed enclosure two small temples. The bigger one located on the northern side contains a rare idol of Sree Paramasiva and Sree Parvathi Devi seated on the bull, Nandi. Legend claims that it was recovered when the *Teertham* was being dug during some unspecified past. Another version is that when the idol was brought into the city (further details unknown), it was so molten that it was advised to be installed as near as possible to some water source of exceptional worth and hence this site. The second Temple is much smaller and is occupied by Sree Hanuman Swamy believed to have been brought by the Potties of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple hailing from Udupi who are known as the *Akkara Desi Potties*. This place was sanctioned by the then ruler. Neighbouring it is a shrine for the *Navagrahas*.

The two age old temples dedicated to Vishnu and Siva and one of comparatively later origin for Brahma come within the historic Sree Mithranandapuram complex having ongoing strong interconnections with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The residences of the two Pushpanjali Swamiyars and lands attached to the hermitages, the quarters of the four Nambies as well as the unmarried priests of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the sacred pond from where sand is taken for certain ceremonies preceding the two *Utsavas* of the big Temple all fall within the confines of Mithranandapuram. The Sree Krishna Temple belonging to the *Thrissur Naduvil Madhom* Pushpanjali Swamiyar which is held to be erected on the Samadhi of Sree Vilvamangalam himself is also here. However, now the *Munchira Madhom* Pushpanjali Swamiyar resides just outside the eastern wall of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, at the *Chempakathumoottu Nata*. Many are the *Churunas* of the big Temple featuring the Mithranandapuram complex, since for long, not only was it under the sway of that Temple being akin to its *Keezhedam* (കീഴ്ചെടം), it also used to be the venue of numerous sessions of the *Ettara Yogam* and connected happenings. It used to play host to many Namboodiries who aggregated in Ananthasayana Nagari from far and near to take part in the much-talked of *Murajapams* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. In passing it is recollected that Brahma worship is virtually non-existent, as such the presence of a Brahma temple assumes special significance. The



only other live temple in South Travancore seems to be the Valiasalai Temple in the capital city itself. Another Brahma temple exists in Thirunavaya in North Kerala. (Mention is being made of the famous Thiunavaya Sree Mukunda Temple nestling on the banks of the majestic Bharathappuzha river as this Temple finds a place among the 108 *Thiruppaties* sung by the Alvars.) Since Mithranandapuram features again in this volume, especially in the chapter *Worship of the Celestial*, restraint is being exercised here.

Charming beliefs prevail like that of Sree Padmanabha Swamy being the second elder brother of Varkala Sree Janardana Swamy, the eldest being Sree Adi Kesava Perumal of Thiruvattar. The Parthivapuram Sree Vishnu Temple is considered by experts as one of the oldest temples in Kerala of yore. Now it belongs to Kanyakumari District and is close to *Munchira Madhom*. The idol is in standing posture facing west and is believed to be face to face with Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Another belief is that Sage Vasishta and his wife Arundhati who reside in the Rishymangalam Sree Krishna Temple (in the city) engaged in worship there, proceed to the northern *Nata* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, twice a year for the solstice *Sivelies* to pay homage to Sree Padmanabha Perumal, and they come accompanied by the *Sapta Rishies* (seven sages). The presiding Deities of Thiruvattar, Thiruvananthapuram and Thiruvalla (all *Alvar Thiruppaties*) had a three cornered connection which was mirrored in the quantitative measurement of commodities utilised etc. An old saying of the land "sitting Swamy, standing Swamy, supine Swamy" relates to the Bhagavans of Thrippoonithura,<sup>4</sup> Thiruvalla and Thiruvananthapuram respectively. Ottukal Street Sree Madasami Temple is another example. Legend has it that wood was brought from Thirunelveli for certain constructions to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and this Madan who resided in a particular tree which was chopped up, came along with it. In discovering the presence of this spirit, a separate place of abode was put up for him. When the *Utsavas* take place in the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the ceremonial *Kuta* for the Madan is conducted before or after the *Painkuni Utsavam* since the Madan is believed to be remaining within the big Temple throughout the festive season to participate in the functions there and to offer his worship there.

The *Perumals* of Thiruvattar and Thiruvananthapuram remain closely bound to each other with this closeness being mirrored not only in festivals which coincide, special days and many rituals, in the institution of the Pushpanjali Swamiyars which they shared in common, but even in the structural pattern inclusive of the presence of the *Ottakkal Mandapam*. In both cases the *Moola*

4. *Sree Poornathresha who is Vishnu seated on the coiled Ananta has His famous Temple in Thrippoonithura and is the dynastic Deity of the Cochin Royal Family and presiding Deity of that region.*



*Vigrahas* are of *Katu-Sarkara* and are containing *Salagramas* idol. The strong affiliation of the Venad kings to Thiruvattar, their privileges and responsibilities are on record providing ample evidence of enduring interconnections. Many ceremonies had to be initially performed at Sree Adi Kesava's great Temple before being conducted here.

Potties from this Temple are deputed for *Puja* in major temples like Ettumanoor, Kumaranalloor etc. even though they are not *Vaishnavite* in nature.

Far flung indeed were the contacts of this Temple to distant lands like Udupi, Neeleswaram, Kumbala etc. It is indeed a matter of happiness that the traditional links with the former two have survived implacable time and its uncompromising demands to continue into the 21st century as well. Among the two groups of Brahmin Potties who are engaged in worship here and who go by the nomenclature *Akkara and Ikkara Desies*, the former hail from ~~four~~ <sup>ten</sup> identified *Madhoms* located in Udupi while all the members of the latter community collectively known as *Pathillakkaru* owe allegiance to ten specified *Illoms* coming under the Brahmasree Pulloor Yoga Sabha of Neeleswaram. Meemani, Vaarikkaadu, Anjanamthodi, Gokarnam, Goshala, Maakkaramkodu, Aaraamvaadi, Meivaadi, Maritambaadi and Thaliyilavaarikkodu (or Thekkathillom) comprise the *Pathillakkaru* (those of the Ten *Illoms*). The Madikkai Kakkaattu Sree Maha Vishnu Temple is administrated by this Neeleswaram Yoga Sabha and all the Potties on deputation or otherwise for worship in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple have to compulsorily pay their homage and seek blessings here before departing to Thiruvananthapuram.

The Sri Ananta Padmanabha Swami Temple in Kumbala, Kasaragod District (extreme North Kerala) is another famous temple with hoary connections. Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar carried out penance here in a cave, before starting out southward in quest of Anantankatu and the divine Child.

## 2. Neighbouring temples

Apart from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which dominates the entire area, many are the not-so-big but significant temples of ancient and modern origin which abound in this region. Some of them contiguous to the big Temple have already been introduced in the previous section and are thus not being repeated. The somewhat uncommon temple dedicated to Sree Kiratamoorthy<sup>5</sup> consecrated here specifically for the protection of this city, South Street Devi (Amman) Temple, Sree Ramaswamy Temple, Sree Murugan Temple, Sree Kookkaramadhom Temple occupied by Devi and an exceptionally fine crystal Siva *Lingam* with a small Ganapathy Temple close at hand, and so the list runs on. The presence of a Nagar Temple initially belonging to the Travancore Palace

5. *This concept of divinity prevails more in North Kerala but even there in restricted numbers.*



cannot be overlooked. The idol was unique as it was a growing Nagar necessitating the roof of the shrine to be raised thrice. Finally, following consultations with the proper authorities on such matters, certain rites were carried out whereupon the Nagar has ceased to put on inches. The famous Temples of Sree Siva of Sreekanteswaram and Sree Mahaganapathy of Pazhavangadi with its presiding Deity being installed here as protector of the Fort and the Sree Hanuman Temple which are all just outside the Fort walls and the Sree Bhagavathy Temple of Attukal (enjoying widespread repute) all command escalating popularity in the language of faith. It may be mentioned that the Pazhavangadi Sree Ganapathy was believed to have been brought to this city by a soldier from Agastheeswaram (then in South Travancore) a long time ago and was later managed by the Travancore State Forces. Keeping its military connections alive it is currently administered by the Madras Regiment of the Indian Army following the amalgamation of the State Forces into the army of the nation.

The presence of so many temples of considerable age dedicated to a host of divinities underlines a significant factor other than spiritual greatness. When several parts of India were tragically exposed to cult violence and damage and destruction, no such clashes in the name of God took place here and all forms of the Divine were accepted, absorbed and revered as different aspects of the same Omnipotent Power. This non-differentiation and perfect amalgamation is seen at its superlative best in the sanctum of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple where Brahma, Vishnu and Siva peacefully co-exist. Like the rest of the land of the Malayalam-speaking people, this Temple of sacred and special temporal status remained untouched by the rivalries of the Vaishnavite and Saivite cults. In later ages this acceptance which became tolerance was extended to larger areas too, without compromising on fundamentals. In chapter VI of the *State Manual of Travancore* V. Nagam Aiya states, "*Despite its famed tolerance, for a very long time Travancore headed by Thiruvananthapuram was probably the only country in this part of India where Hindu tradition, manners and custom, Hindu learning and Hindu religion were preserved in their original simplicity and purity owing chiefly to the continuous and prosperous rule of a long line of Hindu Kings from old.*"

The beautiful old Palace complex, rich in history and culture, adjoins the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. There is a private way (still in daily use) for the Royal Family to enter the Temple through the Palace itself. The annual *Navarathri* festival is conducted on these premises. The complex which contains numerous Palaces of varying vintage is collectively known as *Valia Kottaram* (Big Palace) and flanked by the eastern and southern entrances of the Temple. Some Palaces outside the complex were located on the northern side too. One



landmark is the clock tower in the Palace complex on the eastern side of the Temple bordering the main road leading to the eastern entrance. It exhibits a fancy clock in wood having the face of a *Mopla* (Muslim) with a goat on either side. As the clock strikes according to the number of chimes, the two goats move in unison and butt the man's face from either side and his mouth opens wide with each butt by the pair. In *Marma* technique which deals with the handling of the vital nerves and pressure points of the human system, there is mention of *Atavati Marmam*. When pressure is applied simultaneously on both sides of the face below the ears, the mouth automatically opens. Perhaps this principle was kept in mind in the making of this clock. This old curiosity clock is said to have been inspired by Dutch know-how but manufactured locally and operates on pulley power. The same horologist (clocksmith) who manufactured the big clock in the Padmanabhapuram Palace, which also works on pullies, is said to have crafted this clock. It was then submitted as an offering to Maharaja Sree Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma. The Maharaja ordered the construction of the present clock-tower specifically to accommodate this clock. It is a great local and tourist attraction and crowds gather to watch it strike and motivate action. It is well known in local language as *Methan Mani* (or Mopla Clock).

Another landmark inside the Fort, though currently facing sad neglect and being in danger of losing all its characteristics due to exposure to weather and misuse by people, is the old kneeling granite elephant — the *Kall Ana*, facing the *Padma Teertham*. It is close to the current Sree Abhedananda Asramam. Story has it that it was constructed in the turbulent reign of Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma as a silent sentinel of the Fort.

So Thiruvananthapuram rests in the reflected glory of her Master, Sree Padmanabha Swamy, and thanks to His divine grace, the fundamental inner core of essential effulgence continues to bloom untarnished in spite of the winds of change and the ravages of time.



# 4

## STHALA PURANAM

### The Story about the Place

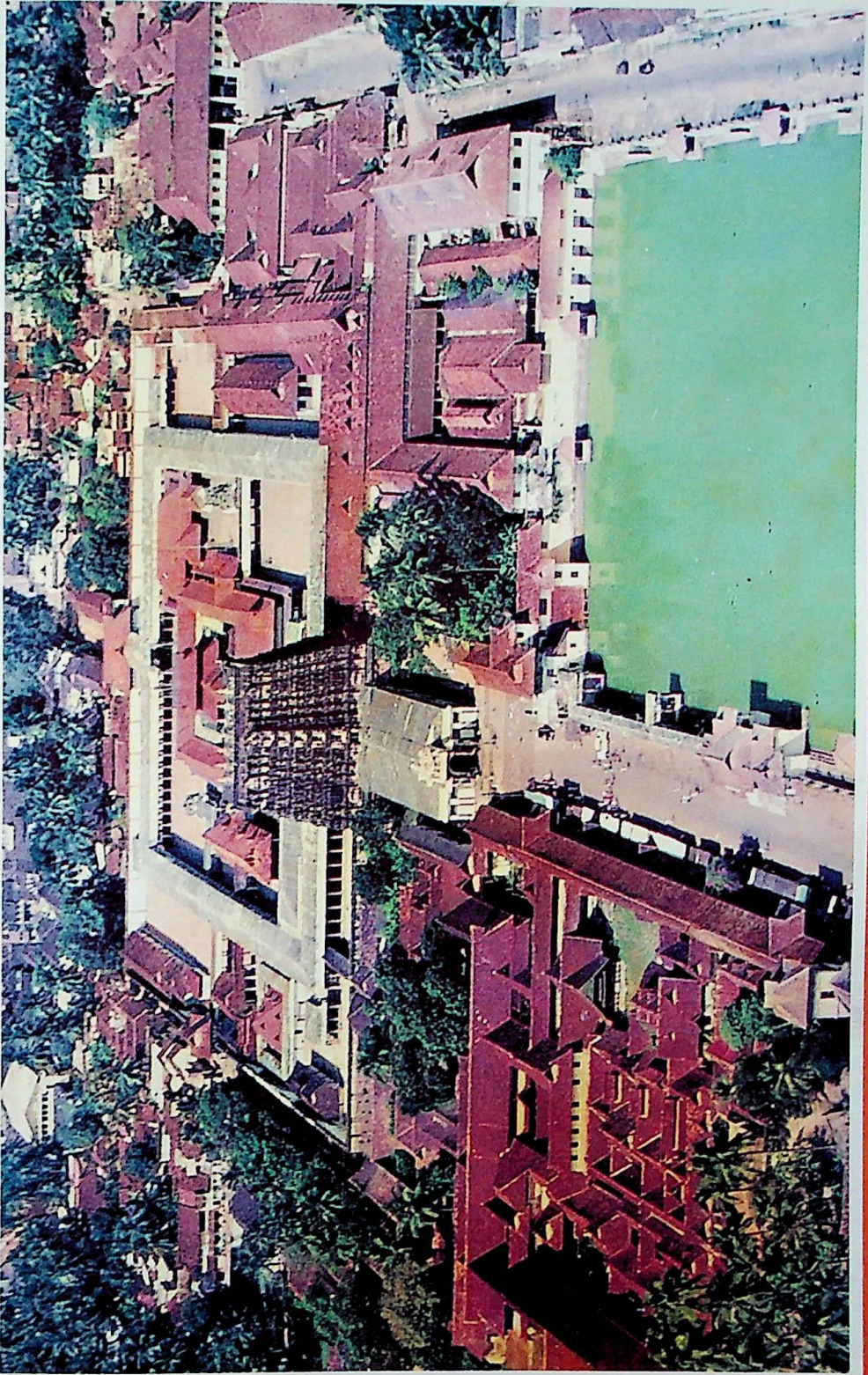
Down through the ages, narrations connected with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple have been in circulation by word of mouth. As is common where proper chronicling is absent, anachronisms inevitably manifest. This is particularly true as the great age of the Temple and the time slot of the *Sthala Puranas* which dwell on the consecration of this Temple stand in direct contradiction.

The unwritten stories, the palm leaf scrolls or *Granthas* of this Temple and the *Anantasayana Mahatmyam* (Greatness of Sree Padmanabha Swamy) all offer the popular versions supporting oral claims of how this Temple came into being. Some of the most enduring ones are included here.

### Divakara Muni and the Gujarat connection

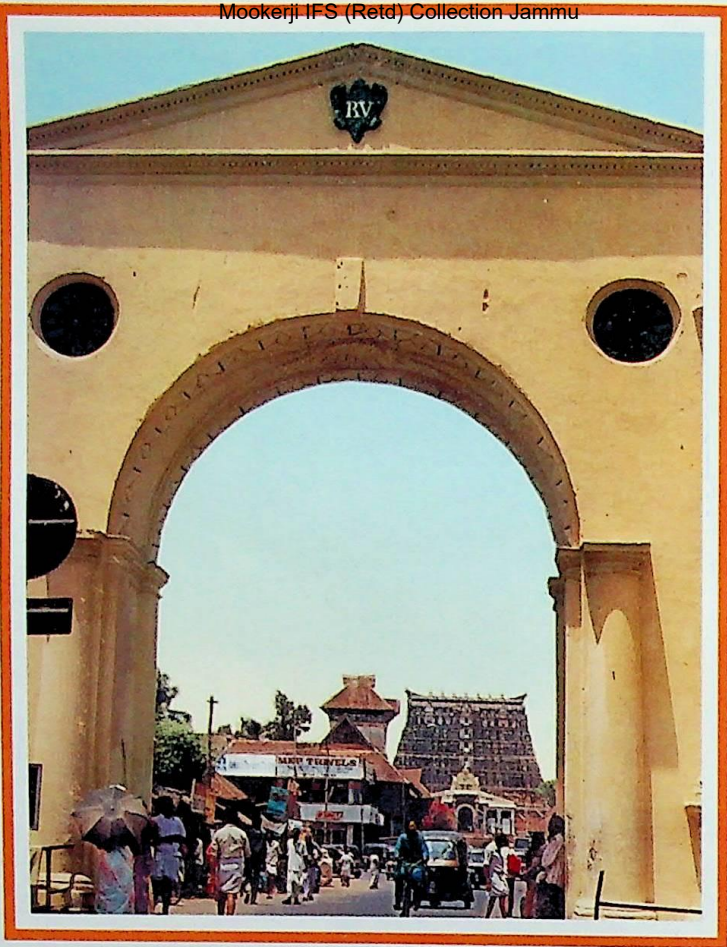
This is a comparatively unknown version and puts forth one of the two claims in existence about Divakara Muni. Here it is held that Divakara Muni hailed from Gujarat where a great civilization flourished on the banks of the Sindhu river (Indus) and a port town named Lotthal thrived there. Many excavations substantiate this claim. It is said that when this city started to decline in course of time, the people moved on to Dwaraka and from there to the South, in a flow of religious movement. They were led by Krishna Varman of the Vrishni Kshatriyas, who claimed descent from Sree Krishna Bhagavan. Great trials faced these people. During the dark days of the clan, Sree Krishna Swamy appeared in a dream before Krishna





Aerial View of the Temple





East Nada



North Nada



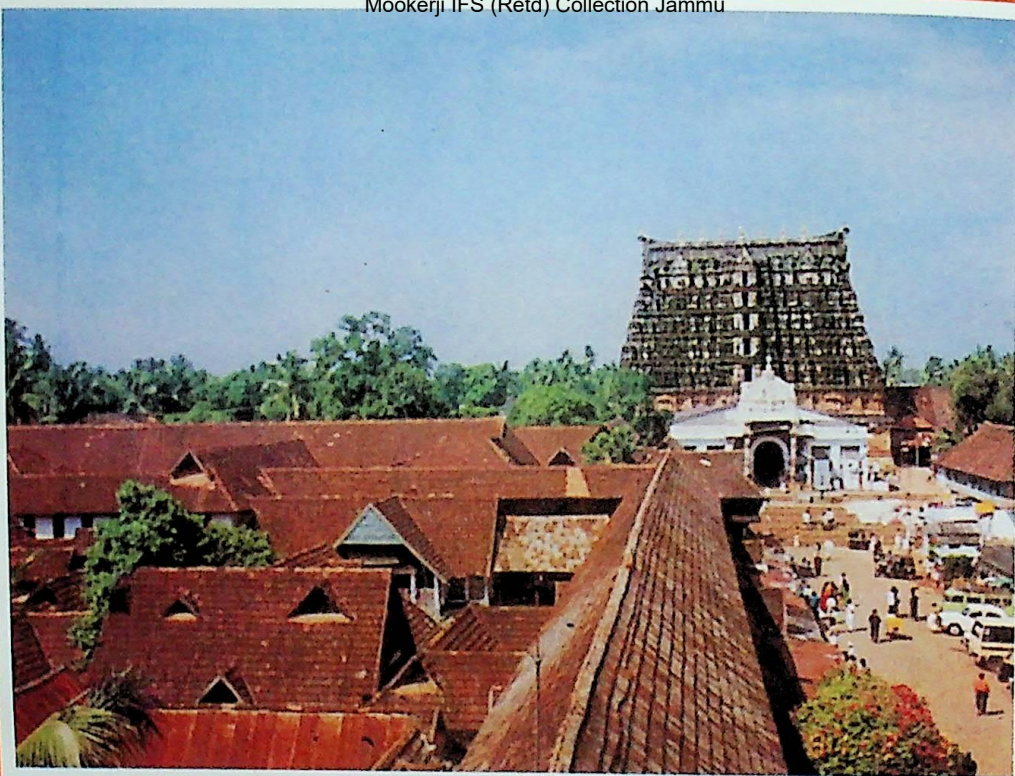


West Nada



South Nada



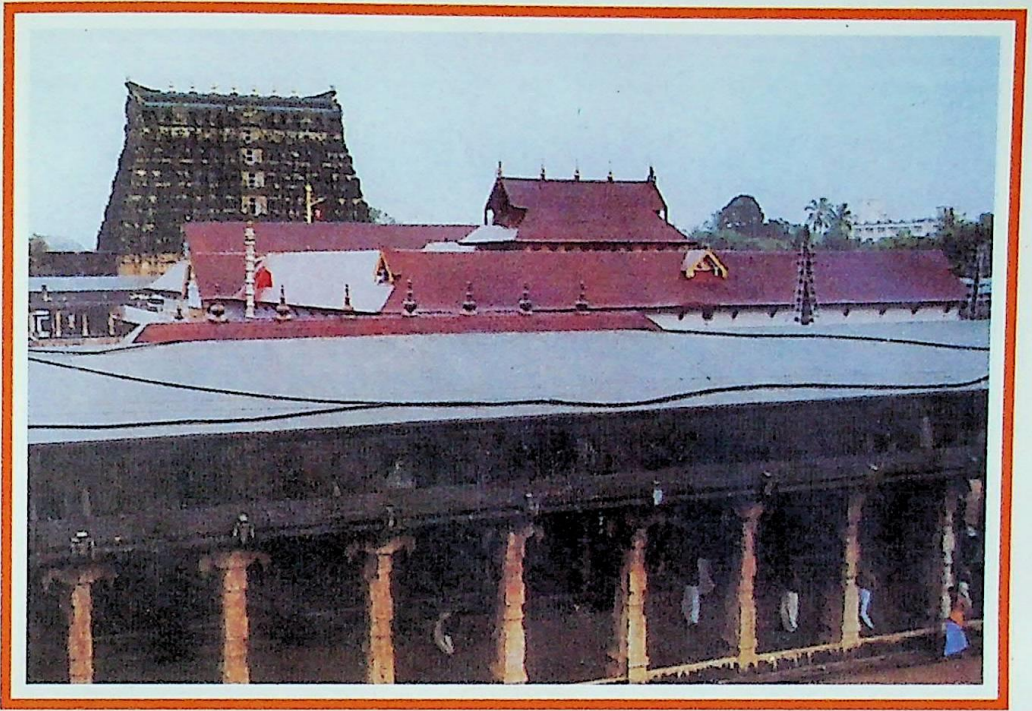


View from Fort Palace



Old Stone Elephant near the Padma Temple  
CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhant Gangotri Gyaan Kosha

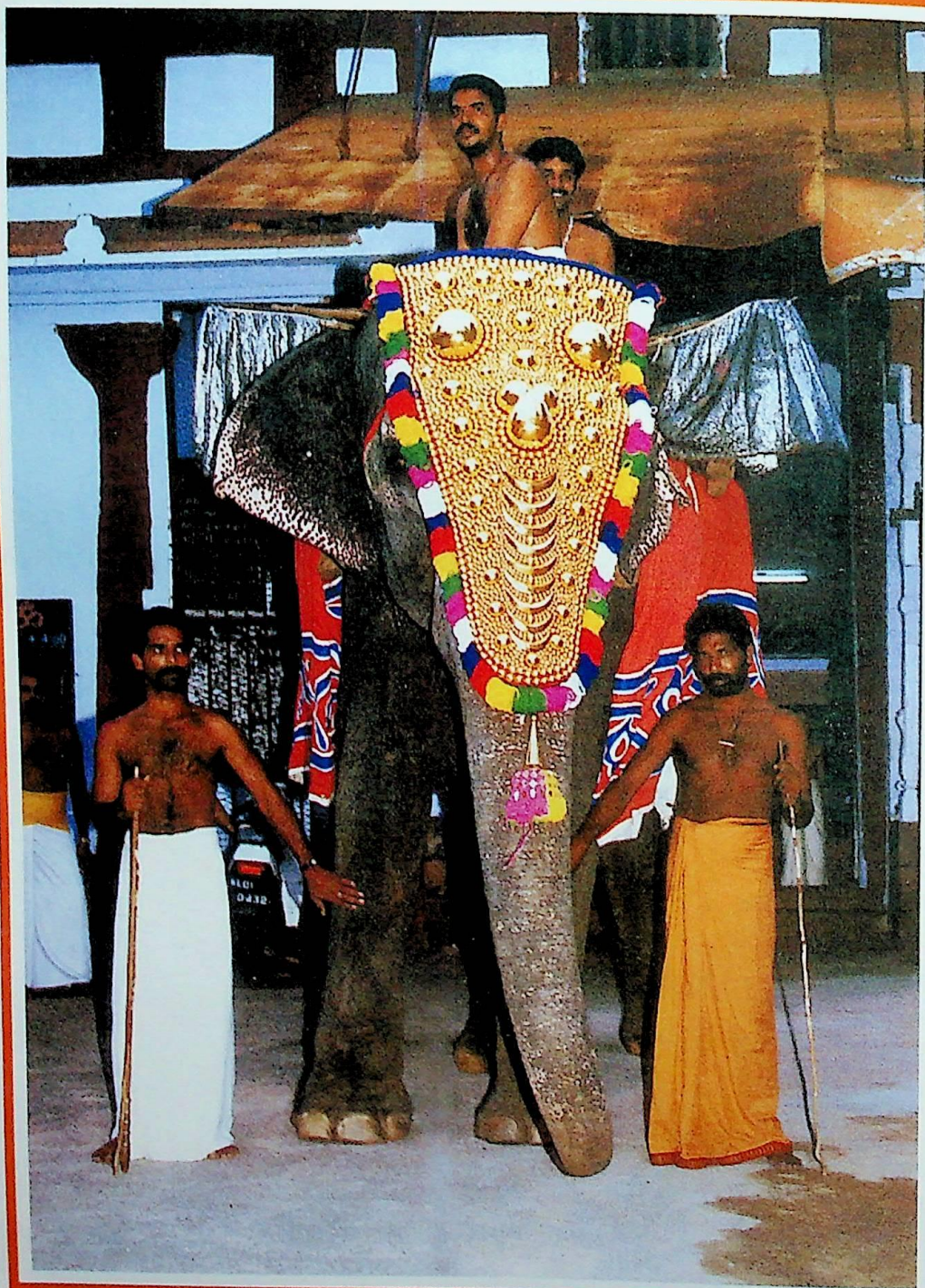




View from the west with the two flags hoisted for Utsava

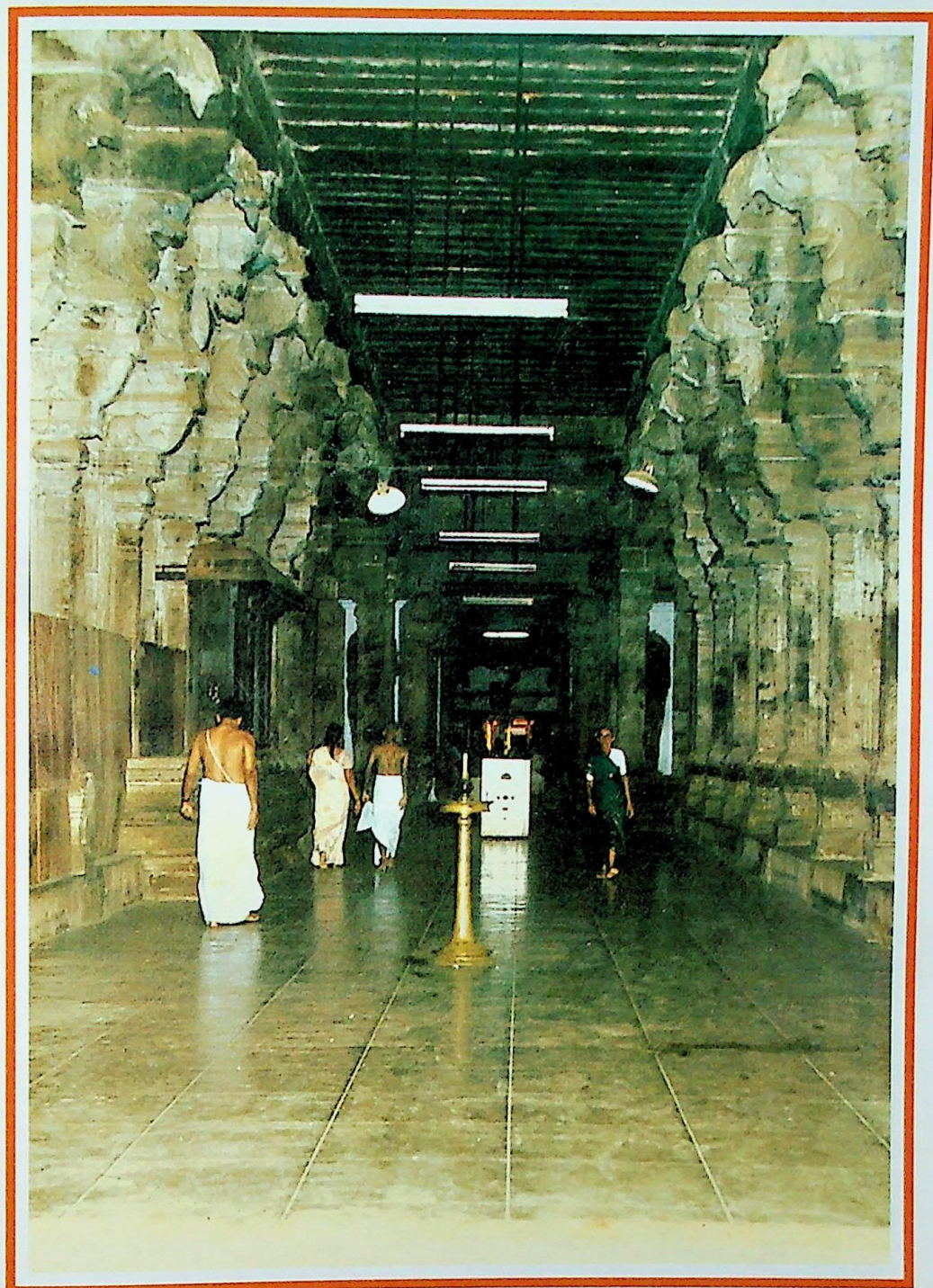






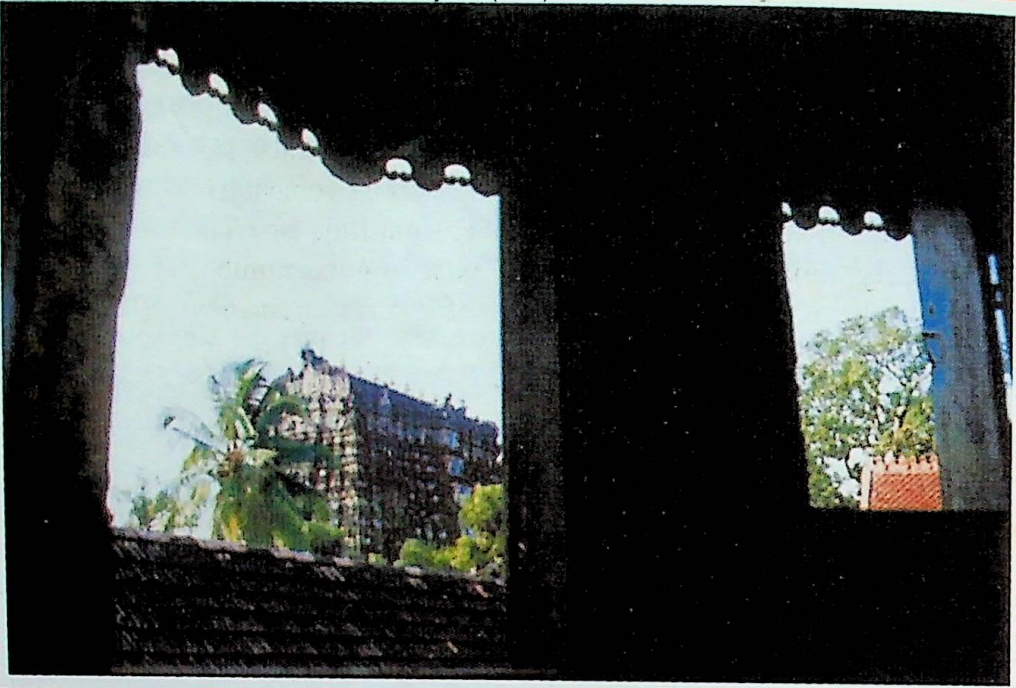
Priyadarshini - The Temple Elephant





The Natakasala Mukhappu





View from Ambarimukhappu  
(Swati Thirunal's Composing Room)



The Granite Mandapam on the Sankhumughom  
where the deities rest on Arat Day



Varman directing him to proceed with the seventy two families southwards to 'Ananthasayana Nagari' where He would be present to protect them.<sup>1</sup>

They reached Venad ushering in the Sree Krishna cult. This may have been a revival of Sree Krishna worship. This famous movement has been confirmed by historians like Clarience Malloney, Sri Unni Raja etc. The descendants of these early Gujarati immigrants still exist in good number in and around Padmanabhapuram, the one-time capital of Travancore and now in Tamil Nadu, going by the name of *Krishnan Vaka Alkar* or people belonging to Sree Krishna. They are said to have brought with them many a century ago, the Idol presently seen in Thiru Ampati in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This Idol had originally been in the Temple in their home land and that Temple was known as Thiru Ampati. Along with a *Salagrama*, the idol came to Thiruvananthapuram. This Idol which displayed exceptional power was gifted by these people to the then ruler who in appreciation granted them extensive areas of land, tax free, comprising quite a few villages which continue to be inhabited by them. The ruler was Udaya Marthanda Varma and the period the Kali year 3912. Consecration was in the 1st ME, 5th of *Chingom* star *Thiru Onam*, Friday in the presence of a full assembly of dignitaries including the Swamiyar and the five *Swaroopom* heads. Divakara Muni is portrayed as the venerable Sage who accompanied this Idol. This story has an obvious drawback as it is restricted to the Thiru Ampati portion of the Temple.

## Divakara Muni and the Tulu connection

The second and decidedly more popular version has it that when Divakara Muni, a Tulu Brahmin Sage, was doing penance in *Athartha Desam*, in Kumbala near Mangalore, a radiant two year old child appeared before him, one day.<sup>2</sup> A great love was born in the heart of this ascetic for this little boy and he asked him who he was. The child replied that he had no father, no mother and no home in particular. The sage then requested the little one to make his home with him. The child agreed on one condition that if ever he felt humiliated he would not continue to stay there even one minute more. There came a day when the little boy was in an extremely naughty mood. The sage's patience came to an end when the little one put the sacred *Salagrama* (a sacred stone pertaining to Vishnu) from Divakara Muni's *Puja* into his little mouth. In irritation he sharply reprimanded the child. Immediately, true to his prior condition, the child ran away, proclaiming as he sped on, that if ever the Muni desired to see him, he would have to go to Anantankatu and seek him out there.

1. 1. Kamukara. M. Kesava Kurup - 'Vanchibhoopanchika' - TVM. Edition, 1076 Meenom, twentieth issue.
2. V. Nagam Aiya - (Editor) *The State Manual of Travancore*.
3. Vadakke Kotta stone writing (വാടകകോട്ട കല്ലെഴുത്തു) of the Temple.
2. Divakara Muni did penance in a cave in Kumbala before this episode. The cave still exists.



Then realisation as to the true nature of his little companion dawned on the sage and in despair he ran in the direction taken by the child. Finally after searching long he reached a forest near the sea-shore just in time to see the child disappear into a big *Iluppa* tree (*Basia Longifolia* – Indian Butter Tree). In a trice the tree crashed down. Wonder of wonders it became transformed into a mighty form of Lord Vishnu resting on Ananta as Sree Padmanabha Swamy, with the head touching Thiruvallom, body spreading across Thiruvananthapuram and the feet extending up to Thrippadapuram or Thrippappoor! This was the divine vision granted to Divakara Muni. Unable to imbibe a revelation of such magnitude stretching to eighteen miles in length, the saint prayed that the Lord be pleased to limit His form to three times the length of the Muni's *Yoga Dandu* (staff) to accommodate his limited, mortal vision. His plea was heard and the mighty Form shrank to the required dimensions. Thereafter the sage performed the worship of the Lord in great adoration. Pleased by his devotion the Lord decreed that henceforth Tulu Brahmins hailing from Divakara Muni's homeland conduct the daily *Pujas* for Him. The strong Tulu Brahmin tradition existing in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple thus stands explained. In this context Divakara Muni is given a period dating to the month of *Idavom*, 225 ME corresponding to May/June of 1050 AD.

Since the story of this sage finds a place in the *Brahmanda Puranam* in *Golavistaram*, stanzas 1-15, in the *Samuchayam* and in Sree Swathi Thirunal's *Prabandham*, the acceptance gained by it in relation to other versions is by far the greatest. Due to clash in time frames, the conclusion is reasonably arrived at that there were two Divakaras bound to this Temple who lived in different centuries.

## The Pulaya connection

It is said that when a Pulaya<sup>3</sup> woman was working in a field she heard the wail of an infant. To her surprise she found a beautiful baby boy close at hand who seemed abandoned. The aura surrounding the baby was so apparent that she feared to touch him. However moved by his continuous crying, she washed herself and cradling the baby in her arms fed him with her breast milk. The baby then fell silent. She placed him gently under the shelter of an *Iluppa* tree. In a flash a five-hooded cobra appeared and removed the infant to a hole in the tree, sheltering him with its hood like an umbrella. The Pulayi and her husband, overcome by this divine occurrence, would daily go to the spot and offer husked rice as well as milk in a coconut shell. The king of this land, on hearing of this wondrous happening, went there and immediately had a small temple built at that place, which later grew to its subsequent impressive proportions.

3. *The Pulaya community comes well down on the ladder of the caste system.*



The Travancore king did not forget the Pulaya family and made over to them as absolute gift, a paddy field near the Temple. This came to be famous as Puttarikkandom and the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple used to enjoy its produce which was submitted by this family after each harvest. Today no lush field is seen there and in its place stands an open ground used for various purposes.

## Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar and the Namboodiri connection

This is the most accepted version regarding the consecration of the Temple and relates to the famous Namboodiri Brahmin sage by name Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar. Three Vilvamangalathu Swamiyars have lived during different times, according to some.<sup>4</sup> Vilvamangalam I dates to the 9th century and Vilvamangalam III to the 16th century (about 1585 AD) with Vilvamangalam II coming in between. Even if the 9th century saint is accepted as the central figure in this *Sthala Puranam*, anachronism is glaringly obvious. The story basically runs on the same lines as that of Divakara Muni, deviating only at certain points. The location is in North Malabar and the Kasargode Sree Anantapuram Temple features in both. Here the child does not stay with the Swamiyar but would faithfully appear every day during the *Puja* time of the sage. The *Salagrama* episode is the same and here the saint shows his annoyance by pushing back the little one with the back of the hand. (To this day it is deemed inauspicious to push someone away, with the back of the hand). The next difference in the story surfaces a little later on. It is said that the Sage ran after the child but soon lost track of him. The sound of the bells on the anklets adorning those little feet and on the waistband guided him for some more time, then they too ceased. The Sage wandered from place to place, consecrating many renowned temples of today on the way and getting many divine experiences. He moved from North Kerala to the South in his ceaseless quest of the divine Child and Anantankatu where he would find him. One evening he rested under a tree, physically and mentally weary. From the opposite side where stood the hut of a Pulaya, he heard the raised voice of an angry Pulayi threatening her baby who would not stop crying, that she would throw it into Anantankatu if it did not stop wailing. The joyous Sage rushed to the hut and in answer to his question, the woman pointed to the near-by forest which was the destination of his long search. After blessing her and taking a single lighted wick from her to aid his progress into darkness in search of the Supreme Light, the Swamiyar entered the forest. Before long, the dearly familiar sound of the waistbells and anklets could be heard. In the pre-dawn hours, suddenly an *Iluppa* tree crashed down with a mighty sound before him and a great radiance manifested. On reaching the spot he got the *Darsanam* or vision of God as

4. This is the view of the researcher Rama Pisharoti and many other scholars. Mahakavi Ulloor however discounts this claim stating that there was only one Vilvamangalam.



Sree Padmanabha Swamy reclining on the serpent chief Ananta. The extent of this form and the subsequent reduction in size in response to the Sage's prayers are the same as in the story about Divakara Muni. Having nothing else to offer to the Lord, the *Swamiyar* took a small unripe mango from a nearby tree and placing it in a dry coconut shell submitted the same to the Lord in an overflow of emotion. The offering of a salted mango in the coconut shell which is reported to be the same one used by the *Swamiyar* though now covered with gold and gem studded, continues as an important daily *Nivedyam* to this day. In this connection it merits mention that the wood of this *Iluppa* tree is believed to have been utilised to carve the figure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and till the time of Marthanda Varma the Great, the Idol is seen to be of this wood. The *Naduvil Madhom* Pushpanjali Swamiyar's premises lying to the west of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple also contains a Sree Krishna Temple which is believed to have been consecrated on the Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar's *Samadhi*. This adds much weight to the sage's link with the Temple.

The necessary presence of a Namboodiri Brahmin who has embraced *Sanyasam* and has become a *Sanyasi* (renunciate) of a monastic order and who is known as the *Pushpanjali Swamiyar* since he performs the daily *Pushpanjali* (worship with flowers) and holds an important place in Temple affairs, as well as the fact that the traditional Tantri family – the supreme arbitrator in Temple matters – is also of Namboodiri stock – corroborate the ongoing Namboodiri tradition in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

The Sree Anantapuram Temple in Kasargode is related to both Divakara Muni and Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar. Kasargode which is today a part of Kerala was once in Tulu country. As such a trend of thought strongly prevails that both these sages were in reality one individual.

As per these accounts the time slot detailed dates back to some centuries only whereas this Temple has gained repeated mention from the time of the undated *Puranas* and ancient literature. Hence the presence of the anachronism with regard to the popular belief connected with the *Sthala Puranam*. The one explanation seems to be that while it is an established truth that the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple exists enveloped in timelessness, it is possible that this great shrine too faced reversals of fortune at certain phases of evolution necessitating its rediscovery and consequent re-consecration, while the Divinity in the *Saguna* aspect (that which has a form) continued unaffected. The physical constructions however have undergone alterations and structural renovations at different stages of the spiritually and historically significant march of the Temple down the corridors of ages to emerge on the calendar of centuries with the brilliance of multitudinous suns.



## 5

# SUNBURST OF GLORY

### A Special Note

**T**his great centre of divinity, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, claims as its own, certain special features which set it apart on a peak of exalted eminence. A brief reading of the same will contribute to comprehending its unusual character and undoubted position much better.

Its antiquity, magnificence which is many-faceted and location in the heart of the capital of the State, all add to the importance of the Temple. The credentials to its ancient age are too many to be discussed here and appear elsewhere.

Thiruvananthapuram was once a sprawling village spread around the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Scholars mark out this area as perhaps one of the oldest inhabited areas even in South India. The city which developed from this village, drawing its sources for growth from it, is assessed at having one thousand or more years behind it. While many of the great Indian cities grew up due to reasons of commerce or security, Thiruvananthapuram developed and became a claimant to name and fame due to its identification with this sacred Abode, deriving its very source and strength from it. All positive and creative life and activity of the city revolved round this Temple which literally dominated it. The successive names enjoyed by it are all connected directly with it and its presiding Deity. Its present name 'Thiruvananthapuram' is no exception.

While the city became the established political seat of Government as its capital much later on in the time-scale, from unrecorded days it flourished as the religious capital of the land. Many are the devotional works and religious texts in which the name of this Temple appears. As one among the hundred



and eight *Thiruppathies* or great Vaishnava Temples in India, 59th to be exact, as one of the seven *Mokshasthanas* or places of salvation and as one of the six *Narayana Sthalas* or abodes of Narayana in this sub-continent it has commanded undoubted repute and has received in abundance the reverence for centuries.

Despite the changes in the names of the ruling houses 'Sree Padmanabha Swamy' of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram had received continued emotional allegiance and royal patronage. As the dynastic Deity as well as personal Deity of the royal lines who held Sovereignty over this land, the Temple and the Throne were interlinked by bonds which could not be loosened. The Temple coloured all activities of the State and their interests overlapped and became one. With the famed *Thrippati Danam*, the Deed of Dedication of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma the Great, the Maker of Modern Travancore on *Makaram* 5th, 925 ME/1750 AD, Sree Padmanabha Swamy became the temporal as well as spiritual Head, the Monarch of the State of Travancore. All honours reserved for the Sovereign were transferred to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the Kings of Travancore thenceforth ruled only as the slaves of the Lord. The term 'slave' is of special note as while servants have the right to leave service, the freedom of this choice is denied to a slave who is forever bound to his master. Not only the rulers but the British Government also recognized Sree Padmanabha Swamy as the real Ruler. It is unique in the world history of religion that a Deity be recognized as the constitutional head of State and Government even by the foreign powers whose overlordship existed at that time. Perhaps a comparison of sorts can be reached in the relationship of the Nepal Royal Family with its family Temple of Sree Pasupatinath in Katmandu. The Temple thus gained definite priority over the throne and we see the infusion of *Rajasam* (royalty) to the maximum possible degree in the concept and worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, often referred to as Sree Padmanabha Perumal - '*Perumal*' meaning Sovereign. Many of the rituals and festivals are conducted on a royal scale, even the staggering quantum of free feeding daily in practice in this Temple was more in line with the court of a great emperor. That is only apt as the Lord in His dual capacity was the Emperor also. (It is relevant to remember the great king of this land, Perumchottu Udayan of *Mahabharatham* fame who gave food to both warring factions during the Great War in the name of *Dharma*. '*Perumchottu*' means massive rice.) A special factor of this Temple to be emphasised is that this free food distribution was not limited to the Brahmins even though they were the majority. Many Christian fisherfolk were recipients of this act of grace. The Temple *Churunas* moreover record the assistance and food given to Muslims from outside the city who came here as pilgrims on the Haj pilgrimage. This also is a standing example of the large-hearted tolerance of the benign rule and



care extended by the Temple in the name of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as the King (See also chapter *In Majestic Slavery*).

As such Sree Padmanabha Swamy had three positions which merged as one, invested in Him. He was the Deity of personal choice or *Ishta Daivam* of rulers of Travancore as well as their *Kula Daivam* or dynastic Deity. Later on He became the actual ruler (*Perumal*) of the whole State as well. (The military guard assigned only to the Palaces, guarded the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple till the recent past, once again underscoring the acceptance by the Government in power of the regal and tutelary status of the Lord).

The actual Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy had remained free from the ravages of plundering war lords and external invasions even during troubled years of warfare. No invader had entered its premises flaunting the authority of a conqueror even if many had lusted after its great wealth. As such it was able to preserve an unbroken observance of rites and rituals despite their complexity. Only a few of the major temples in India have been able to maintain unhindered the daily worship and continuity of tradition without prolonged breaks as the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple though one or two dark periods are seen when the doors of the Temple remained closed. Among the over <sup>twenty</sup> two thousand and five hundred temples in Kerala, this Temple continues to reserve a special status all its own.

Specifically ten characteristics of greatness are associated with a *Maha Kshetram* (great temple). They are antiquity, presence of records (palm leaves, inscriptions etc.), historical importance, origin in a forest, nearness to an ocean, location at an elevation, royal connections, mention in ancient literature, magnificence of architecture and grandeur of festivals. The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple qualifies on all these counts including its actual construction which is at a modest elevation (though not on a hill). The enormous special sanctity derived from the presence of the twelve thousand-odd *Salagramas* in one idol is very special in the world itself (See chapter *Inner Radiance*).

Two points are mentioned here as they are connected with the previous paragraph. With regard to the presence of records, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple stands as a centre of historiographic revelation, which finds no comparison anywhere else in the world, ranking it a record-house of awesome magnitude. The value of all the information so painstakingly recorded and preserved in the *Churunas* (cudjan scrolls) of the Temple cannot be assessed as they number to over thirty lakhs. The second point relates to the great festivals with special mention of the fabulous *Lakshadeepam* festival conducted in the Temple and not seen anywhere else. Emperor Kartaveeryarjuna of yore once conducted the *Lakshadeepam* festival. This was in the *Puranic* period, in the



*Mahabharatham* age (Travancore rulers claim descent from this emperor). The next known King to have done it was Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. From the time of Marthanda Varma to now, this festival has never been discontinued thereafter. Despite changes and constraints, it continues to be celebrated, by the grace of God.

Another interesting feature is that from the time of its known inception this Temple has been referred to as a *Maha Kshetram*. There is nothing to indicate that it started as a small temple and developed into a great devotional centre later on.

The presence of Siva in a position of great importance in the sanctum of a *Maha Kshetram* dedicated to Vishnu consecrated far back in time is so rare that perhaps it is the only one of its type in the world.

Despite strong Tamil influence, this Temple has always steered clear of cult clashes which scarred the face of orthodox religion. With the inclusion of Brahma also, the Trinity is present in this innermost enclosure (sanctum).

Certain unusual features in its construction are noticed especially in the placement of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* (single rock platform) and its spiritual conception thereof. Another characteristic is the presence of an unusual multiplicity of *Mandapas* (platforms). Despite geographical constraints, the Temple had an extraordinarily large array of sacred water sources or *Teerthas* situated even in places as far away from it as Varkala and this too contributed to its unique nature.

It is normal that in the worship of Maha Vishnu the *Sankhu* (Conch) is very vital. Yet in the worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy alone, in this Temple, in certain instances the place of the conch is given to the coconut shell (now covered in gold for preservation) and many rituals are performed with it instead of with the conch (Refer chapter *Sthala Puranam*).

The very strict rules of entry, regulation of dress etc., have contributed to preserving its purity and cleanliness which are outstanding.

The *Tantram* practised in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is complex and out of the ordinary. *Tantram* based on the *Anushtana Grandham* and *Padhathi Sampradayam* is performed in varying degrees only in a total of ten temples in Kerala with six of them coming under the control of the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads, who are the Tantries of this Temple. As such certain variations in the rites and rituals when compared with the majority of temples which follow *Tantra Samuchayam* are in existence.



One other aspect which attracts attention is that most of the ancient house names that repeatedly appear in the chronicles of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple from at least the later medieval age, having significant connections with the Temple, exist even now under the same names contributing to the solid continuity of historical and traditional associations. The royal houses and the family *Illoms* (houses) of the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads who are the supreme religious authority of the Temple along with the *Madhoms* (monastic orders) of the *Swamiyars* and the members of the *Ettara Yogam* (administrative council) and the two factions of priests hailing from the two sides of the demarcating Chandragiri river, are dealt with many times in the body of this book. They have played an unbroken part in the matters of the Temple. Apart from them a number of Nair households are seen bearing their ancient house names handed down through the generations. Since they are not being mentioned elsewhere, they are included here because of their recurring appearance in the Temple records. They run as follows: Shankhu Chakrattu Veedu, Maruthara Veedu, Cheppil Veedu, Swaroopattu Veedu, Nedumparattu Veedu, Varuvilakattu Veedu, Pulimoottu Veedu, Kalappara Veedu etc. Irrespective of whether the descendants of these houses remember their allegiance to the Temple which was so vital to them, they are remembered for posterity in its scrolls.

This much in particular about certain special aspects of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, which shines in the brilliance of undimmed glory as the legacy of the Divine, as the Eternal Truth.



## 6

# THE INNER RADIANCE

“हिरण्मये परे कोशे विरजं ब्रह्म निष्कलम् ।

तत् शुभ्रं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिस्तद्यदात्मविदो विदुः ॥”

मुण्डकोपनिषत् II-2-9

## Spiritual Significance: An Attempt at Analysis

**T**he visualisation of Sree Padmanabha Swamy ranks as one among the twenty four concepts of Maha Vishnu. In literal translation it reads as ‘*One who has the lotus in the navel*’. Underlying that superficial meaning lies the entire secret and evolutionary pattern of creation itself.

Many of the ancient Indian texts uphold the sanctity and potency unfolded by the lotus which stands for *Satyam* or Truth. *Padma Puranam* describes the whole process of creation of the ‘Universal Lotus’ comprising the earth, the heaven and the nether world. Following the same trend of thought-projection, Gods, great sages and those possessing enormous mystic powers, are oft conceived in *Padmasanam* (lotus posture) a sitting position with the legs crossed in a specified manner pressing on the power points of the body. This posture greatly aids in exerting control of the senses which more often than not enslave the mind and its domain, the body. When the celestials assume this pose, the control exerted is over their sphere of activity, having wider boundaries. These cosmic Lords are able to accomplish this in their lotus position, absorbed in profound meditation or state of supernatural beatitude.

Sree Maha Vishnu has strong connections with the sun. He is portrayed as the Sun-God Himself, not in the physical sense but as the gravitational centre of the entire universe, the origin of all energy emanating as electro-magnetic radiations. All the *Vedas* mention Vishnu comparing Him to the sun. He is also *Sat*-that which is opposed to *Asat* or void negativity, another aspect of Vishnu.



From *Sat* which cannot be static arose *Chit*-the activating thought-aspect and as the natural outcome arose waves upon waves of *Aanandam*, the pure, unattached bliss in its super-refined stage. The innumerable charge-loaded electrical sparks consolidating forces by their own volition then resulted in the indivisible nucleus of the atom or *Bindu* shattering into fragments in a mighty<sup>1</sup> explosion emitting light, heat and energy. This led to the cosmic creation of multitudes of heavenly strata, solar systems and stellar configurations and all that was, is and will ever be.

The connection between the sun and the lotus is well known. Just as the lotus unfolds in response to the warm caress of the sun, the cosmic lotus flower which is *Sahasradala Padmam* in its extrovert form blooms in Vishnu's radiance, rising from the *Bindu* or central spot of the universal womb of *Sat*. It sets into motion the *Chit* aspect, through its electromagnetic field leading to activation of *Pranavam* or *Nadam* (primordial sound) vibration, as the chord of creativity in order to blossom as the golden lotus of *Aanandam* (bliss). Brahma, the Creator, is now seen seated here as the concrete aspect of creation, in deep meditation. Maha Vishnu as the Sustainer comes to be fully illustrated in the concept of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as He supports the entire system of creation, Brahma included, in Himself. Vishnu too is in a deep meditative trance as He reclines on the Ocean of Milk which is the vast expanse of space of *Sat* later superimposed by pure *Satvagunam* represented by the purity of finite white mingled with the infinite blueness, the hue of *Chit*. This blueness is indicative of omnipresence. From it through the upward coiling stalk of *Aanandam* everything takes shape and form. Sree Padmanabha as such is lauded as *Sachidaanandam* (*Sat + Chit + Aanandam*). In *Yoga Sastram* we find a lot of details regarding this concept. "Accordingly every idea springs from the Supreme Power (*Paraa*) and then at the navel area each of them comes to be 'perceived' (*Pasyanti*). Thereafter they play in the bosom as 'thoughts' (*Madhyamaa*) and finally are 'expressed' (*Vaikharee*) in the outer fields of activity. The evolutionary stages through which every idea becomes an action are given clearer insight in this way" – (Swami Chinmayananda). The thousand petals represent not the exact number of thousand but the awesome multiplicity and unending variety of continuous creation in peaks of potency. *Pushpam* or flower, here the lotus, is given the attribute of the firmament-*Akasatmana Pushpam Kalpayami*. The Supreme Power as the sun or essence of light as the *Thejah-Brahman* plays on this lotus making it unfold in the form of the entire cosmic pattern. It is also a representation of peace. The symbolic and spiritual significance of the lotus is explicit in the phrase *Hridaya Kamalam*. As such it has been dealt with here only in brief.

Sounds which are part of *Nada Brahman* amalgamate to form letters and these letters in their various mystic permutations and combinations assume the

1. This is akin to the 'Big Bang Theory' evolved in the recent past by Western science.



mantle of sacred incantations known as *Mantras*, the study of which forms a science of sound by themselves. The base of the *Mantram* being the individual letter or *Aksharam* (that which has no *Ksharam* or dissolution), its spiritual import is considerable. Each letter remains enshrined in its own aura containing its specific vibrations and sanctity. This aspect is being touched upon here as the clue to a more comprehensive insight.

In his scholarly work on the *Gayatri Maha Mantram*, Sri P.R. Rama Varma Raja, Valia Thampuram of Poonjar Palace, spells out the divine charges in each set of letters. Accordingly, all the letters of the term '*Padmanabha*' relate to Rudra (and are Saiva in nature). The ancients might have intentionally evolved this word formation to highlight the unity of the two supposedly opposite concepts of existence which in reality gravitate to a single point of oneness.

Sri Rama Varma Raja also interprets the five letters based on certain scientific conclusions thus:

1. "Pa" "ᵑ" — *Purusha* (Creation)
2. "Da" "ᵔ" — *Jihva* (tongue) or taste leading to the exalted taste of Bliss or *Aanandam*.
3. "Ma" "ᵑ" — *Sparsam* or touch suggestive of *Pranam* or life-breath.
4. "Na" "ᵑ" — *Gandham* or smell (awareness)
5. "Bha" "ᵑ" — *Pani* or hand (Karma). It is also *Nadam* from which the first spark of creation, the *Bindu*, emerges

Brahmasree Mithran Namboodiripad explains the letters as follows:

1. "Pa" "ᵑ" — *Pakara Beejaksharam*<sup>2</sup> *Sabdam*- that which contains all and is contained in all (Omnipresence).
2. "Da" "ᵔ" — *Dakara Beejakshara Sabdam*- the act of giving, indicative of the supreme gift of the impact within the other *Beejaksharas*
3. "Ma" "ᵑ" — *Makara Beejakshara Sabdam*-Trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Siva as one.
4. "Na" "ᵑ" — *Nakara Beejakshara Sabdam*-that which denotes creation from space.
5. "Bha" "ᵑ" — *Bhakara Beejakshara Sabdam*-that which annihilates the darkness of unenlightenment.

2. '*Beejaksharam*' is the first syllable of a *Mantram*.



The letters contained in "Padmanabha" represent certain actions and ideas the explanation of which is beyond the scope of this book. They are revealed in works like the *Ekaksharakosam*, *Kamadhenu Tantram*, *Varnodhara Tantram*, *Nanatantrasastram* and so on. Dr. Sambasivan states that the sum total of all these ideas contained in the word-group will mean the inconceivable, unqualified, impersonal Brahman appearing as the conceivable, qualified, personal Brahman, the quintessence of all *Vedas* and other sacred texts.

An in-depth study of this realm will open door to metaphysics, the chemistry of sound and matter and areas unexplored by the ordinary level of thought, and will make it too complex. As such a further analysis is uncalled for.

The elaboration of the term and concept of "*Padmanabha*" was attempted thus far. Moving away from the general to the specific, some aspects of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple at Thiruvananthapuram and its presiding Deity of eternal effulgence are now presented. A word of clarification seems to be in order here. In this chapter, at many instances, the author's personal view-point based on traditional religious thought, is projected.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy of the Temple under discussion is conceptualised as *Shantaswaroopam Moorthy*. There is a strong belief that the aspect of service to the Lord is more stressed here; submission and subsequent satiation of many a need are secondary. Through this service the needs of the devotees are met by the Lord. This is in line with the saga of service and surrender by generations of rulers of the dynasties who were kings of this land, as *Sree Padmanabha Dasas*.

Normally Indian iconography leans heavily on the *Dhyana Slokas* or descriptive stanzas of the Deities which the craftsmen follow faithfully. However the *Moola Mantram* or fundamental sacred word-group which is specific to the individual divinities, stands revealed only to the spiritual men, the true sages, through intuition. Almost all great temples claim direct involvement of some famed sage who imparts this sacred and secret incantation to a chosen few. In the case of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple also, this holds good. Consequently the shutters are inevitably being downed on certain Temple-related matters which remain forbidden to the public at large.

The concept relating to the main reclining Deity is that Sree Padmanabha Swamy is in *Yoga Nidra* or *Yogic* slumber with eyes kept partially shut and the left hands holding the mystic *Chin Mudra*. He is at peace and bestows peace on His devotees as *Shantakararoopam*, the very form of peace. There is no alteration in this basic concept despite the later infusion of absolute royalty.<sup>3</sup>

3. This aspect came into force with the *Thrippati Danam* of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Maharaja Marthanda Varma in 1750 AD.



The visualisation of the Lord is presented as follows. The celestials after their unsuccessful pleadings at the doors of Brahma and Siva, finally approached Lord Vishnu to present the case of the tormented earth, harassed by the demons, especially by the Rakshasa (demon) King, Ravana. Vishnu agreed to incarnate on earth to save her as well as the sages who were being inflicted with much suffering by these powers of darkness. This was the seventh incarnation of Maha Vishnu, as Sree Rama. As the celestials stood by in reverence, before His descent to the world of mortals Maha Vishnu sank in a deep *Yogic* trance. His mighty form contained within it the entire cosmic order, with the earth as His feet, the creative aspect in His navel, the body enfolding within it the complete range of celestials, terrestrials including plant, animal and bird life, demonic forces and the elements of nature, with the sun and the moon which are day and night, as the two eyes. He is in supreme control of *Maya* or illusion, reality and eternity as well. The destructive aspect as Siva, is also close at hand. At the same time He is at absolute peace. It is thus that the Omnipotent Godhead is characterised in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

An attempt is being made to develop each inner aspect of the main Idol as well as the other idols in the sanctum sanctorum based on spiritual symbolism. As per hearsay this Temple is a *Samadhi Kshetram* also, since there is claim that at the holy feet of the Lord in the main shrine there is the *Samadhi* of Agastya, the great sage who has many connections with this southern part of India as seen in the *Puranas*.<sup>4</sup> The Lord is reclining on the mighty five-hooded serpent Ananta, whose body is coiled thrice. The hoods turn inwards over the head of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as though in service like an umbrella. The three coils represent the three *Gunas* or characteristics of mankind *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* (representing light, energy and inertia) while the five hoods project the *Panchendriyas* or the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, which stand in everlasting service to the Lord, Who is in total command of these consolidated human tendencies which dictate man's actions. The tail of Ananta is tucked in but the tip is visible as required of a perfect idol. *Ananta* means that which has no end. The serpent Ananta is a *Nitya Jeevatma* or eternal soul having no birth or death and hence Infinity itself. The Lord Who rests on this eternal magnitude or *Anantam*, contains all. In reality Ananta has to be an extension of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself. Which other potency has the power to support the Lord other than Himself! This serpent functions as a *Peetham* or base for the Lord according to the *Tantries* of this Temple. The entire idol, Ananta included, is of *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam*, a special composition and it is a rare *Katu Sarkara Salagrama Vighram*. (This has been explained in great detail in the chapter *Abode of the Divine*).

4. In his authoratative work 'Bharathathile Chila Samadhi Kshetrangal' the great seer Sree Ayyaswami Thiruvathikal categorically proclaims that Anantasayana in Thiruvananthapuram is the Samadhi Kshetram of Sage Agastya.



A more earth-bound explanation of the presence of Ananta is included here. The first Aryans imported into Kerala by Sree Parasurama abandoned it. It is said that then the *Nagas* or serpents of the lower world surfaced and occupied these regions. Parasurama brought back the Aryans but as a compromise ruled that while the land would go back to the Aryan settlers, a place would be demarcated in every household for the *Nagas*. This came to be termed *Nagaru Kavvu*.

It is only in the fitness of things that this importance got reflected in the Temple that exerted such influence over the territory. The serpent, visualised here as Ananta, gained a special place of honour right in the *Sreekovil* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as the bedrest of infinitude of the Lord.

All the Idols seen in the sanctum sanctorum are fashioned out of *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam* including the magnificent recumbent form of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The exceptions are the three *Abhisheka* idols of the Lord and Goddesses Lakshmi and Bhoomi, the *Siveli Bimbam* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the *Siva Lingam* and the two Garudas used for the processions. By themselves the *Katu-Sarkara* figures present a fantastic display of artistic excellence as well.

The marvellous figure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy stretches on Ananta in conscious cosmic slumber with the head positioned to the south and the feet to the north. This is in accordance with the energies emitted by the electromagnetic field of positive and negative charges wherein positive concentration is present in the direction of the south. The actual shrine faces the east. The residing potency was withdrawn from the original Idol which was made of *Iluppa* wood and infused into the present *Katu-Sarkara* Idol by performing certain complicated religious ritualistic processes. The Tarananalloor Tantries state that when this mighty procedure is being carried out, they, the Tantries, pray, that residing in this idol for the benediction of the entire universe, the tremendous potency of God Himself be pleased to enhance, day by day, the prosperity and well-being of all. The interior of this Idol is filled with twelve thousand and eight *Salagramas* or sacred stones collected from the bed of the River Gandaki in Nepal and brought on elephant back. The link between Maha Vishnu and the *Salagrama* is a long standing tradition. The Lord is believed to be present in it—*Yatha Salagrama Harih* just as Hari (Vishnu) resides in the *Salagrama*. When *Salagrama* is used in an Idol, it is held that no separate or special consecration is necessary as the power is naturally reserved and concentrated in it. So it came to represent Vishnu Himself or as *Visvaroopam* in *Akasha Tatvam*. The formless *Nirgunam* manifests itself, in Saguna form in *Salagramam* as Vishnu, in *Lingam* as Siva and in *Chakram* as Devi. Twelve *Salagramas* worshipped together gain the potency of a *Maha Kshetram* or great temple. The mighty *Anantasayana Moorthy* here gains the greatness and sanctity of a thousand



*Mahakshetras* due to the veneration of the twelve thousand and eight *Salagramas* confined within this one Idol. There is no other such known idol existing in the whole world. It is perhaps apt that the main Idol of the divine child chastised for making one *Salagramam* impure should have the Idol made for Him with twelve thousand-odd *Salagramas*. *Salagramam* worship as part and parcel of Hindu religious life came into prominence during the Puranic period.

Measurement of idols is normally done on a unit termed *Thalam*. Maha Vishnu idols favour *Dasathalam*, which is deemed to be the best but in them also two differentiations appear, of maximum and medium excellence-*Uttamam* and *Madhyamam*. Here in this Temple it is believed to be still different and of eighteen feet in length (three times the length of Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar's staff which measured six feet). A few are of the opinion that it is twenty two feet, six feet more than the sixteen-foot figure of Sree Adi Kesava Perumal of Thiruvattar with which it closely connects. There is no way of verifying the dimension, as idols once consecrated should not be measured. One conclusion can be safely arrived at, however, that the great masters and deciding authorities of those bygone days would have done everything connected with the temples only after taking into account what is the aptest and the best. Since Ananta himself is raised, the Idol appears at an elevation. The colour of *Katu-Sarkara* being black, the Idol itself is often mistaken to be of black granite.

It is indeed a wonder that no ants and other such pests have attacked the Idol, attracted by its coating. The material used being such, no *Abhishekam* (holy bath) is performed on it, thus necessitating the presence of separate metal idols for this purpose. No <sup>full</sup> *Anki*, or replica made of precious metal, is placed on the Idol for fear of damaging it. Worship with flowers is all that is done. The old flowers are removed by priests only of certain ranks by brushing the Idol gently with peacock feathers.

In this description of the Idol, the starting point is the sacred feet of God. In Hindu thought they have always had enjoyed a special place as the refuge and anchor of mankind. *Vishnu Padam* or the feet of Maha Vishnu exhibit some sacred symbols on the soles. Different texts put their number as five or seven. The five are *Padmam*, *Yavam*, *Ankusam*, *Dhwajam* and *Vajrayudham*. The seven listed are the *Padmam*, *Sankhu*, *Chakram*, *Matsyam*, *Dhwajam*, *Kalpaka Vriksham* and *Amritha Kalasam*.

The five symbols are interpreted thus:

1. *Padmam* or *Lotus* — The significance of the golden lotus of creation having been dealt with in detail, it is not repeated here.



2. *Yavam* — Barley corn, a type of grain. This mark seen on the palm and soles represents prosperity, progeny, good fortune etc.,
3. *Ankusam* — Denoting control with chastisement when it becomes called for, indicating kingship (It is a stick with a metallic hooked end, used to control elephants).
4. *Vajrayudham* — A weapon of sure destruction which acts as a warning to those who err and indicates mastery of the whole universe (Indra's thunderbolt).
5. *Dhwajam* — The flag, symbolic of elevation, fame, valour and victory.

The seven symbols which are found in another text are elaborated as follows:

1. *Padmam* or *Lotus* — Vide prior interpretation.
2. *Sankhu* or *Conch Shell* — Symbol of purity. In the activated form, it contains the primordial sound of *Om*karam. Destroyer of misfortune, inauspiciousness etc.
3. *Chakram* or *Wheel* — The wheel of Time or *Kaala Chakram*.
4. *Matsyam* or *Fish* — The first incarnation of the Lord was as the fish. *Tantra Samuchayam*, the exhaustive work on *Tantram* in Kerala, speaks of the tongue, shaped like the fish. The science of *Matsya Rekha* is dealt with separately in dermatoglyphics and is indicative of divinity (This may also offer an explanation about the fish design repeated on the ceiling of this Temple). The *Makara Matsyam*, fierce and strong, is symbolic of royalty.
5. *Dhwajam* or *Flag* — Explained in previous section.
6. *Kalpaka Vriksham* — Tree of Boons. Indicative of granting of all wishes. It is one of the five divine trees.
7. *Amritha Kalasam* — Pot of Nectar - suggestive of Immortality.



The holy markings are not clearly discernible on the soles of the Swamy. Passage of time as well as the smoke from the lamps over the ages could have obscured them to a very great extent.

It is held that Sage Agastya installed a very potent *Chakram* beneath the place where the feet of the Lord rest. To those who take refuge in them, these holy feet lead the way to the ultimate path by activation of the dynamic will.

While the right leg lies straight, the left one is slightly raised. It has been the habit of makers of icons and idols to introduce an element of dissimilarity of posture in them especially with regard to legs or hands. This is for orientation of space. From the navel rises the stalk which ends in the open lotus on which Brahma, the four-headed Creator, sits in meditation. The four heads denote the four *Vedas* — *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharvam*.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy reclines flat on the back and is shown with only two hands. The left hand, holds the lotus, which is the lotus of the heart, and displays the ~~Chin<sup>2</sup> Mudra denoting that the Supreme Soul and the individual soul are one.~~ The right hand, also in *Chin Mudra*, drops downwards. Underneath, on a small gold platform is a *Siva Lingam* representing the destructive potency of the Lord. This *Lingam* is fashioned out of the *Saiva Salagrama Sila*, which is somewhat uncommon. According to different thought processes, Siva's presence is variously interpreted. Some hold that Sree Padmanabha Swamy is performing *Puja* to Siva while others opine that the *Pralayakala Siva* or Siva at the time of the Great Deluge is being given refuge under the protective hand of Vishnu. Anyway all the three aspects of existence-creation, preservation and destruction are found together within the sanctum. Creation is interpreted as thought, preservation as remembrance and destruction as oblivion by some thinkers. The vital aspect of the sanctum is the total absence of cult clashes for superiority, so common in many parts of India, especially between the followers of Vishnu and those of Siva. Amidst the great ancient Vishnu temples, this Temple seems to be the only one in the world where Siva is in a place of such prominence. It is said that not only he who realises but also he who accepts nondifferentiation is a true devotee. A perfect example of such true devotion is presented here.

The face of the *Moola Bimbam* with fine chiselled features including a straight nose and enigmatic lips which assume many shades of expression, is so beautiful that it superimposes itself on the receptive mental framework of man. The eyes are the sun and the moon, a representation of the day and night-the wheels of Time. In *Yogic* slumber the eyes are half shut.

Behind the Deity, on the wall, are the figures of the thirty three crore celestials, who include Narada, Tumburu, Sanaka and the seven Munies. They also present the positive potencies. *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam* is used in their construction as well.



Right in the middle portion of the shrine, viewable through the central *Nata* (doorway), the three *Abhisheka Moorties*, which are the gold Idols used for *Abhishekam* are seen in a standing position on a grandly decorated low, elongated base. The Lord is in the middle with hands showing the symbols of *Abhayam* and *Varadam* with Lakshmi Devi and Bhoomi Devi on either side. On the left of Bhoomi Devi there is a smaller Idol in silver which is the *Siveli Bimbam* or the idol taken out for ceremonial processions. It also represents Sree Padmanabha Swamy and is in a sitting posture. The main Idol is reclining, the *Abhisheka* Idol is standing and the *Siveli* idol is sitting, representing the three main postures of living things which are *Sayana*, *Udhishta* and *Aasanastha* aspects. According to some spiritual texts there is special enhanced sanctity in temples where all these three aspects are present and where *Rishi Puja* (*Swamiyar Puja*) exists. Here in the main sanctum itself, all these are incorporated.

On either side of this group of idols facing north and south are seen four fairly big figures in *Katu-Sarkara* representing the two wives of the Lord, Goddesses Lakshmi and Bhoomi, and the two Sages with matted hair and beards, whom the Tantries of the Temple identify as Bhrigu Maharshi and Markandeya Maharshi. All of them are seen seated on separate bases. Lakshmi Devi sits to the right of the central group and faces north. She represents prosperity. On Her opposite side to the left of the group and facing south is Bhoomi Devi representing the earth-the cradle of all creation. These two Goddesses who are really the vibrations of Vishnu in material presentation, await in ready service to Him by His side. Lakshmi holds a lotus and Bhoomi, a sheaf of grain in the hand. A third wife Neela is mentioned in some places like in the *Brahmanda Puranam*. If She is present here within the sanctum, it has to be only in concept as no idol is seen.

Bhrigu Maharshi faces north and is seated near Lakshmi Devi. There is a belief that Bhrigu is the father of Lakshmi Devi. In a story from mythology it is understood that once sage Bhrigu, enraged by an imagined insult from Sree Padmanabha Swamy Who he thought was feigning sleep when he went to call on the Lord, kicked Him in the chest. The Lord immediately started up from slumber, apologised to the sage and asked if his leg had been pained by its contact with His rough-surfaced chest. Realising the enormity of the act committed by him, Bhrigu fell at the feet of the Lord begging for pardon. Comforting him Bhagavan declared that a permanent mark would appear and adorn His chest where Bhrigu's foot fell to bring home the point that whatever His true devotee does would only please Him. The mark is famous as *Sreevatsam* and is equated with the infinite compassion of Sree Padmanabha Swamy for His faithful followers. Bhrigu's presence in this inner shrine must be to emphasise this aspect.



Markandeyan is placed near Bhoomi Devi and faces the south. In many of his compositions, Maharaja Swathi Thirunal too has referred to this sage, perhaps to this particular representation.<sup>5</sup> Markandeyan has two identities. As the Vaishnavite sage he is also considered to be the father of Bhoomi Devi. Markandeyan is an acclaimed devotee of Siva, who bestowed immortality on his human form making him a *Baddha Jeevatman*.

The two Garuda birds, one gold-plated and the other silver-plated, belonging to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy respectively also find a place of honour inside the sanctum. They are used in one of the sets of six different *Vahanas* (vehicles) for the Deities during their ceremonial circumambulations, but these two are invested with a special divinity as *Pranapratishtha* has been performed to them. This sets them apart from the other *Vahanas*. Garuda too is a *Chiramjeevi* or *Baddha Jeevatman* possessing eternal life. Because of their special status they are treated differently and once they are taken out they are naturally purified before being returned to their abode in the inner shrine. A single wick lamp is also lit for them.

There are three entrances in a row which give access to the Sanctum Sanctorum. Legend has it that they are a reminder of Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar's request to Sree Padmanabha Swamy to reduce His awesome size of eighteen miles to three times the length of his six foot *Dandu* (stick). The *Moola Vigraham* (main Idol) can be viewed only through these three doors partly and separately. The door at the crown denotes cosmic intelligence or divine wisdom, the middle door indicates the heart of the shrine and the love and creation arising out of it and the door at the feet of the Lord points to the ultimate path to salvation. Another line of thought sees them as the three phases of time itself—past, present and future, so significant in projecting the transient nature of mortality.

Emerging from the sanctum sanctorum with its super-charged concentrated divinity enveloped in timelessness, we reach the *Ekasila Mandapam* or single rock platform. Though conjoining with the sanctum, it is an independent structure underlining the principle of Oneness of the *Paramatman* (here the sanctum) and the *Jeevatman* (here this *Mandapam*). On it, on either side of the central door, just on the outside stand the two fierce and famous *Dwarapalakas* or guards of Lord Vishnu, Jayan and Vijayan. They carry the insignia of the *Sankhu* (conch) and *Chakram* (wheel) on their crowns. The *Jwala* (fire flame) symbol commonly seen on the crest of *Dwarapalakas* is conspicuous here. They are executed in handsome proportions. Opinions are at variance on the substance used to make them but they appear to have a sort of copper hue and are believed to be of *Panchaloham* (alloy of five metals). They also have a claim to sanctity and receive a share of the *Beli* (sacrificial offering).

5. The version of Markandeya as a great devotee of Vishnu is also popularly accepted.  
CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhanta Chakrabarty



The platform made of a single stone has featured at length in the chapter titled *Abode of the Divine* as also in *Legends and Folklore*, still it cannot be excluded here due to its spiritual significance. It is taken as an extension of the sanctum sanctorum in concept (though not in physical construction) due to the absence of the usual *Sopanam* (steps) leading up to it from the ground level. Being monolithic in symbolic nature, it conjoins the sanctum as well. It is due to this identification with the sanctum that certain unique restrictions are imposed with regard to this *Mandapam*. The priests who are in service in the sanctum do not touch the *Mandapam* when others are standing on it. Anything that is placed on it, whether it be by accident or intention, becomes the property of the Temple. That explains why no one is allowed to prostrate on it. The male babies of the Travancore Dynasty alone are placed on it on their first birthday by the mother and surrendered to the Deity, to be transformed as *Sree Padmanabha Dasas* (Refer chapter *In Majestic Slavery*). Even ascending the *Mandapam* is an extremely sacred act. The *Abhishekam* performed on the concerned Idols placed in the sanctum, which is normally done there itself in other temples, is done here differently. Daily they are brought out on to this *Ottakkal Mandapam* and the rituals are performed here as it is deemed to be the continuation of the sanctum. No one is allowed to touch it when the rites are in progress on it. The single stone structure stands for oneness — standing on that which is one, thinking of One and the only One, to become one with that One.

Between the interior and exterior regions of the Temple as a whole, fifty divinities are consecrated singly, in groups or in concept in sacrificial stones including the major one. Sacrificial offerings are made to all of them. They should not be confused with the stones or altars used for sacrifice of life of any kind, human or animal, which has never been carried out in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. By 'Sacrifice' only sanctified food offering is meant. These Divinities include a whole range of celestials such as Ganapathy, Dakshinamoorthy, Guardians of the eight quarters-Ashtadikpalakas, the Seven Mothers-Sapta Mathrikkal, Sastha, Nirmalya Dhari, Dwarapalakas, Kshetrapalan and so on. The list is incomplete as it will otherwise be too long and also because the nature of some of the divine potencies is kept secret. All these forces add to the Temple's sanctity and act as protective cordons.

The presence of many other *Pratishta* idols and subsidiary shrines is seen in this Temple other than the main Idol. This has always been the prerogative of the *Acharya* or Tantri who conducts the main consecration. Sometimes these other shrines are incorporated based on astrological predictions. Yet another possibility is that in course of time the idols worshipped at home by some Tantri or other get consecrated as temple idols in the places where they perform *Tantram*. It is not possible, due to lack of records, to present here how the other



small shrines took their birth in the premises of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Sufficient proof is available to show that many of these shrines existed far back in time.

The sanctum sanctorum has been taken up first as it is the nerve centre of this Temple; other features now come under survey. This description does not adhere to the stanza which details the route to follow when one goes to worship at the Temple. (This stanza appears in the chapter — *Worship of the Celestial*). The sanctum being the very heart it has been made the starting point to put across the idea of the sublime radiance originating from a single power-point and diffusing all over to other shrines, idols and consecrated centres.

Other than the visible and invisible seats given to various potencies, there are two more shrines in the *Cheruchuttu*. The first shrine facing west has two sets of idols in *Panchaloham* of Sree Rama, Lakshmana and Sita Devi. While the figures standing directly inside facing the doorway are attired and adorned in regal style, the second set, a little to the right, stands stark in contrast as these idols are presented as in the period of *Vanavasam* or stay in the forest. Hanuman, ever devoted, stands on top of a stone base. He is also in *Panchaloham* and smaller in size.

A small silver Ganapathy (Elephant God) sits in front of the first set of idols. He is one of the <sup>three</sup> two Ganapathy idols of this Temple. Ganapathy has a very prominent position in Hindu religious thought and customs. He is knowledge incarnate, remover of all obstacles, powerful protector and easily propitiated.

The next shrine in this enclosure is that of Sree Vishvaksenan in *Katu-Sarkara*. He presents an imposing figure in sitting posture and faces the south. Two concepts exist with regard to this celestial — one as *Guru* and the second as supreme commander-in-chief. If the first concept is accepted, the remaining part of the food offering to him can be utilised but if the latter holds good, the food after the offering of the *Nivedyam* is immersed in water. Vishvaksenan in this Temple comes under the former classification.

Here Vishvaksenan is given a position of great prominence normally seen reserved for Lord Ganesh in other temples. According to the *Tantries*, this Vishvaksenan is the *Nirmalya Moorthy* possessing *Vishnu Amsam* or part-potency of Vishnu, with the right to the early morning worship and to the same *Nivedyam* after it is offered to the Lord. He is a *Nitya Jeevatma*. Innocent of all external decorations, the *Nirmalya Moorthy* is the very *Sat* in its pristine form. Normally a *Nirmalya Moorthy* assumes the concept of being seated in the middle of an eight-petalled lotus in the shape of a *Beli* stone. Here he is presented as a full-scale figure in *Katu-Sarkara*. Vishvaksenan is one among the thousand names of Maha Vishnu and as such as he can be taken as Vishnu Himself. He holds a conch and a disc in his hands.



Three types of *Jeevatmas* are identified in the sacred texts as *Badha Jeevatma*, *Nitya Jeevatma* and *Mukta Jeevatma*. *Badha Jeevatmas* like Hanuman and Markandeyan have birth but no death. Thus they inherit immortality and are super souls in bondage known as *Badha Jeevatma*. The *Nitya Jeevatma* has no birth and no death and does not inherit or acquire immortality being all along immortal. Vishvaksenan comes within this definition. *Mukta Jeevatma* is the mortal bonded soul with no claim to immortality but having the option to work for *Mukti* or liberation of his soul.

A shrine of great fame down the ages is that of Sree Narasimha Swamy, commonly referred to as 'Thekkedathu Sree Narasimha Swamy' by virtue of the fact that the said shrine is located to the *Thekku* or south of the sanctum. Like the main shrine, this one also faces east but is at a comparatively lower elevation. The fourth incarnation of Maha Vishnu, Sree Narasimha, is a combination of Man and Lion. This idol is made of *Panchaloham*. A small *Siveli* idol in silver sits close by. According to the present *Jeer* of *Ahobila Mutt*, there are, in all, forty-four concepts of Sree Narasimha. *Ugra Narasimha* found here is one among them. He is extremely powerful in this Temple and many are the stories of His potency. It is on record that when the re-consecration of this Potency was carried out long ago, the force was so intense that a fire flared up of its own volition, necessitating certain rituals to be performed before proceeding further. The *Sutras* or holes found in a square pattern on the opposite wall facing this shrine (which are not normally seen in that location) were introduced to balance this power. Many approach Him for triumphing over hostile forces. Sree Narasimha Swamy is one among the three main Deities of this Temple and accompanies Sree Padmanabha Swamy for the *Siveli*. As mentioned previously, His silver Garuda vehicle is kept in the sanctum of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Much difference of opinion prevails on the nature of this Swamy. According to one school of thought, He is claimed to be *Yoga Narasimha* or Sree Narasimha in *Yogic* meditation. It substantiates this claim by pointing out the posture of the Lord sitting on His haunches with the two hands extended straight over the knees and dropping downwards in a typically *Yogic* stance. The *Yoga Bandham* or the *Yogic* band encircling the body below the knees emphasises this point.

Another explanation of the *Yoga Narasimha* concept is also offered hereby. Like Sree Padmanabha Swamy who sank in deep *Yogic* slumber before Rama *Avataram* (incarnation), Sree Narasimha went into *Yoga* before His descent to destroy Hiranyakasipu. He continued to be fearsome even when immersed in *Yoga*.

In the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple *Granthavari*, the Deity is described as *Sree Narasimha Aananda Perumal* (Lord of Bliss).



The Tarananalloor Tantries, who are the final deciding authorities on all such issues, however, differ on this aspect. They emphatically state that the concept is undoubtedly that of *Ugra Narasimha Swamy*, who is ferocity personified. The outbreak of fire at the time of consecration is itself proof. Moreover, after nightfall even the Temple staff fear to approach that shrine once it is shut and many have felt the invisible presence of a fearsome lion in the vicinity. The Tantries further discount the *Yoga Bandham*, which is clearly visible, stating that it is not a *Yoga Bandham* at all as it does not form a continuous circle around the Idol but is cut at the two sides forming just a front piece. They quote the actual *Dhyanam* which is available in their sacred texts, in support. In translation it reads as follows:

*"I venerate that Omnipresent Sree Narasimha Swamy who possesses the hue of many precious gems like the Manikyam (Padmaragam or ruby), who strikes terror in the hearts of the demonic hordes with the fearsome radiance emanating from His form, who sits with two hands placed on the knees and with the conch and disc (Sankhu and Chakram) held in the other two hands, whose tongue which takes on the colour of angry fire, perpetually hangs out in a face made ferocious with projecting fangs and whose hair on the head bristles and stands erect in anger."* The Tantries ruling has to be accepted.

The following information offers strong support to the Tantries, stand and belief regarding Sree Narasimha Swamy of *Thekkedom*. Sureswaracharya of around the 8th century AD, a prime pupil of Sree Adi Sankara, was a committed devotee (*Upasakan*) of Sree Narasimha Swamy. The superimposition on him of Sree Narasimha at His most ferocious occurred in response to his fervent prayer to the *Swamy* to save Sree Sankara, from death at the hands of the *Kapalikas*. Consequently Sureswara was able to vent destruction on this wild tribe and rescue the great *Guru*. This is a well known narration. Oral tradition passed down the ages holds that it was Sureswara himself who installed Sree Narasimha Swamy, his *Ishta Devata* (deity of personal attachment), at the present site in this Temple. Since the consecration was done by Sureswara, it is logical to conclude that the concept of the consecration would certainly have been *Ugra*. A few centuries hence, Sarvajnanatmayeti of Sureswara tradition (*parampara*) who was a renunciate of *Thrissur Naduvil Madhom* established by Sureswara in the 8th century AD was deputed to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as Pushpanjali Swamiyar. He lauds Sree Narasimha Swamy present here in his scholarly poetic composition thus, once again, confirming His presence before that time (Refer chapter, *Search of Sources*).

Records of the Temple also cite the instances when the roar of a lion arose from within the inner area of the Temple. Even today the personnel specially appointed for the safety and security of the inner shrines – the *Thirumeni Kaval Kurups* – are present as two, once the Temple is closed as they are apprehensive to be on duty singly because of the nature of anger and power of Sree Narasimha



Swamy. At the same time He is most generous in bestowing boons when pleased. Daily recitation of *Ramayanam* continues to be done on the long steps to the right of this shrine in order to pacify and cool the fire of Sree Narasimha Moorthy. The rendering is done throughout the length of time the shrine remains open except during certain specified periods. One slender figure of Hanuman Swamy made in *Jeeva Dandam* (live-ivory) which has special sanctity and two small figures in silver and brass stand in front of the reader as though lost in the narration.

The small shrine containing Veda Vyasa, who sits on a platform with Aswatthama standing to his left, comes next. This shrine faces west. Veda Vyasa's *Pratishthas* are exceedingly rare throughout India and can be counted on the finger tips. He is Maha Vishnu Himself Who incarnated as this great preceptor in the declining years of *Dwapara Yugam*, tracing his mortal descent from the ever illustrious Sage Vasishta. It was he who codified and categorised the mighty mass of *Vedas* into four sections known as *Rig, Sama, Yajur* and *Atharvam*. His shrine in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple definitely enhances its aura of spiritualism. It may be his presence that increased the patronage extended to education down the centuries to such expansive proportions.

Aswatthama is also a *Jeevatma* without death-he is a *Chiramjeevi*. The son of Acharya Drona, he has featured in the *Mahabharatham* epic many times but in a fairly unfavourable light. In this shrine, he stands close to Vyasa. Both of them are fashioned out of *Panchaloham*. It is a riddle why he should be given this place of honour in this Temple as his qualifications are minimal. Legend has it that he was told that the only way to escape the curse that had befallen him to wander around the earth without any rest, following the dastardly act of slaying the sons of Panchali while they slept, was to take refuge at the feet of Veda Vyasa Bhagavan. As long as he stayed by his side, Aswatthama would get respite. This was absolutely essential since he had no death, as such his very coveted immortality would become a curse as he was doomed to wander for ever and ever. The Tantries are of the opinion that to quell his trauma after the Mahabharatha War and to gain some peace, he has been given a berth here near Vyasa Muni. A legend connected with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple says that Aswatthama was told that the only way to his possible salvation was to go to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Syanandoora Puri and to mingle with the crowds in the guise of an ordinary man and worship the night *Deeparadhana* of the Deities at the Western *Nata* (entrance) during the biannual festivals of this Temple for many lengths of time. This *Deeparadhana* at the western entrance has all along been upheld as exceptionally sacred. The thirty-three crore celestials are said to be present there then to perform worship.

There is also a point of view that Aswatthama is slated to be one of the *Sapta Rishies* in the next *Yugam* or time frame after the great flood. As such he is already given a seat next to Sree Vyasa.



The place demarcated as the area of the *Thrippadam* (sacred feet) of Sree Padmanabha Swamy is of special note. Two eternal lamps burn on either side. Belief has it that the Lord is always present at this spot. Devotees claim to gain solace and peace by touching or putting their head on that particular long window-like area. It is here that the resonance of *Pranavam* or muted roar of the Ocean of Milk is discernible at times.

The *Swayambu* Sastha in *Yogasanam* or *Yogic* posture and the Kshetrapalan in sitting posture are made of granite and face the east. The latter is one of the eight Bhairavas<sup>6</sup> of Siva who perform the role of protectors to temples.

The Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Swamy shrine is unique and enjoys the status of an independent temple within the complex, with its own facing *Mandapam*, sacrificial stone and flag mast and looks to the east. The standing figure of Sree Krishna, (the ninth incarnation of Maha Vishnu) as *Parthasarathy*<sup>7</sup> is of medium build and in stone, the *Siveli* idol being in silver. The very concept of *Parthasarathy* is significant. He acts as the charioteer of Partha (Arjuna) in the great Mahabharatha War and thus gets this appellation attached to His name, but the meaning goes much deeper. Just as the Lord steered Arjuna through the dangers and disasters of this terrible war, He guides and guards all those who surrender at His feet in faith in this vast battlefield of life. Outside this shrine alone, the attendants are females. Their very expressions and stance are soft and gentle. Perhaps it is an attempt to highlight the value of loving submission in a service of total dedication. Sree Krishna Swamy of Thiru Ampati is the third major Deity of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and He also participates in the festival processions along with the other two Deities. It is believed that there exists an underground *Chakram* (wheel) where the collection of *Beli* stones are seen together on the southern side of the Thiru Ampati shrine. A subdued resonance is claimed to emanate from there. Another theory is propounded by the present head of the Ayya Swami Mission that here too a *Samadhi* exists lending potency to this area.

The Agrashala Ganapathy facing west is today the single shrine dedicated to Lord Ganesh within the Temple premises but operating on a different footing. Originally this idol was installed in the cooking area as a witness and to oversee the massive free food distribution conducted by the Temple. With the decline in this activity due to altered circumstances, He has come into His own with

6. The eight Bhairavas are Vidyarajan, Kamarajan, Nagarajan, Swachandarajan, Lambiyarajan, Devarajan, Ugrarajan and Vighnarajan.

7. In royal position the hands are not usually found hanging straight down on the sides and the favoured pose seems to be that the left hand rests on the side of the thigh in what is known as *Katibandham*. It is also a pressure point. Though the Bhagavan acts as a charioteer to His friend, that does not divert Him of His essential royal posture as indicated by the pose.



His separate place of worship. Even today He is connected with the concepts of plenty and prosperity of the bygone yesterdays.

In the area where stands the big *Belikkal* (the main sacrificial stone) is seen the massive granite figure of Sree Hanuman Swamy. His fame is constant and He continues to command the devotion of many. The astounding aspects of this idol have featured in the chapter *Miracles*. Hanuman is a *Badha Jeevatma* drawing His acknowledged prowess and power from just one point of concentration – His unwavering depth of devotion to Sree Rama Swamy. This particular Hanuman radiates charges and is lavish in granting favours and ever ready to extend an arm of protection to his devotees when threatened with danger. His presence is deemed to be an additional talisman even to the Temple. There are people alive now also who claim to have seen Him appear with their own eyes in times of disaster as when there was an outbreak of fire in the Temple during the reign of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma.

To the left of the Hanuman in the middle on the ceiling is a *Maha Meru Chakram* complete with the *Bindu* or Central Point which is engraved in clear focus. This cosmic wheel is said to possess its own charges which contribute to enhancing the existing spiritual strength of Hanuman. He stands as the perfect example of an eternal devotee whose very force is nothing but unalloyed devotion.

Behind the first *Unjal Mandapam* and adjacent to the Maha Ganapathy *Homappura*, is a recently constituted place of worship. It is young in age dating back only to 1992 but its significance in the total scheme of affairs and sacredness by itself are beyond doubt. It contains a temple of wood modelled on the lines of the eastern *Gopuram* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The sliding doors open to reveal the idols which were daily worshipped by Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore, in his personal *Puja*. Many idols representing various Deities are there but the two main idols are of Maha Vishnu out of which one would accompany him wherever he went.

Of the twelve rulers of Travancore starting with Maharaja Marthanda Varma, three had worship of their own personal idols.<sup>8</sup> Following the demise of the two earlier rulers, temples were constructed for their idols. When Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma passed on to his eternal rest, the issue arose as to what should be done with his *Puja*. As revealed in a *Deva Prasnam* (astrological calculation concerning gods) which gave the directive that these idols be taken to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, they were handed over to the Temple along with

8. *Maharajas Swathi, Vishakhom and Chithira Thirunals. The present Valia Thampuran Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma also has his personal worship – the Anantashayee Idol he worships in his Puja already exhibits a miraculous potency.*



the wooden temple and all the *Puja* utensils used by the Maharaja himself, after getting the consent of the Tantries. Approval was also obtained from His Holiness Jagadguru Sree Bharatitirtha Swamigal, Sree Sankaracharya of Sringeri. (The connection between the *Sringeri Madhom* and the Travancore Royal house has been of an enduring nature). Having been worshipped by a personality who had great divinity bestowed on him even during his life time and who had totally dedicated himself to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, they had acquired a very special sanctity of their own.

In the *Bhadradeepapura*, which is situated near the above mentioned construction, a significant worship known as *Chakrabja Puja* is performed. This is done to a *Salagrama* which is installed there. Originally it was performed for victory in the Kayamkulam war waged by Maharaja Marthanda Varma, but thereafter it has been conducted as protection for the many ills befalling the land and for the increasing the prosperity and well-being of the people, as per the desire of the kings. A royal colouring is attributed to it.

Hinduism leans very heavily on symbolism as a medium of expression. Every feature and custom has got some definite meaning behind it. As such the six steps of the northern entrance point to the six *Chakras* of the spinal column. The majestic *Gopuram* is another example in point. Thirteen steps are visible leading up to the eastern outer entrance. The Tarananalloor Tantries believe that there would have been a total of eighteen steps and that five of them have somehow got buried underground. The significance of the number eighteen seems to run on the same lines as the eighteen steps of Sree Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple. They represent the eight emotions, three *Gunas*, five senses and the two states of perception.

In elaboration, the eight emotions are labelled as *Kamam* (lust), *Krodham* (anger), *Lobham* (greed) *Moham* (desire), *Madam* (passion), *Mathsaryam* (competitive spirit), *Dambha* (ego) and *Ahankaram* (pride). The three properties of *Gunas* are *Satvam*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The five senses are those of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Finally, the two states of perception are *Vidya* (knowledge) and *Avidya* (ignorance). As per *Aksharasankhya* wherein letters are equated with numbers, eighteen stands for *Jayam* (victory). In accordance with the codes of numerology eighteen is split into eight and one and added together to give the number nine, which is the symbol of completion.

Yet another interpretation has also been suggested for the number eighteen. The five sense organs or *Panchendriyas*, the five demarcations known as the *Pancha Koshas* of temple construction including their symbolic nature, the five elements or the *Pancha Bhootas* and the three *Gunas* or fundamental qualities give this number.



After the physical cleaning by bathing, mental purification is attempted by ascending the steps as the devotees symbolically stamp on the worldly attributes represented by these steps.<sup>9</sup>

The eastern *Gopuram* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is distinctly Tamil in style. Invariably the Tamil Nadu Temple towers have fourteen floors representing the fourteen worlds from *Patalam* down below or Hell to Heaven or *Satylokam*. In this Temple only seven floors exist. They symbolise the worlds of elevated order commencing with our earth and reaching up to *Satylokam* or *Brahmalokam*. The explanation is that in this *Bhooloka Vaikuntham*, where Sree Padmanabha Swamy rules, the baser or lower worlds and their downward trend merit no importance.

The seven globe-like structures placed on top of the *Gopuram* act as pointers to these seven worlds. The nine outer doors of this Temple indicate the nine apertures of the human body.

Strictly speaking, *Deeparadhana* is foreign to Kerala temple, worship and would have been ushered in by Tamil influences from across the boundary. Even today in many of the private temples of the Namboodiries, this ritual is conspicuously absent. Apart from lighting a wick or a block of camphor deposited on the ground which does not signify this rite, nothing else of this nature is performed. However *Deeparadhana* has now become a significant part of worship in almost all temples and Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is no exception. The evening *Deeparadhana* is by far the most elaborate one in this Temple when six different types of lamps are put into use. It is uncommon to have so many lamps. A symbolic value is being attributed to them as well. In the order of use they are the seven-tiered lamp, the *Naga* lamp, the *Garuda* lamp, the five-wick lamp (*Panchathattu*), the *Kumbha* lamp and the plain camphor lamp. The Tantries tend to view the number 'six' as related to the six *Chakras* or potent wheels connected with the *Kundalini* power.

Both seven and five are numbers possessing an extensive in-depth value and lend themselves to a multiplicity of interpretations. Since many of these conclusions are familiar to all, the need to venture into them does not appear essential. With regard to the *Naga* and *Garuda* lamps, obvious explanations offer themselves. *Nagam*, the snake, could be *Adi Sesha*, the Serpent while *Garuda* is the Lord's vehicle – both being His chief attendants. The *Kumbham* represents the circumference within which the entire creation with all diversities is contained. Last but not least comes the simple lamp used for burning the camphor. It is unadorned like the pristine *Nirmalya Moorthy*. This

9. *Kulasekhara Alvar, who once ruled the land and was a supreme devotee of Maha Vishnu, desired that after his demise he should become the outer step of every Vishnu Temple so that the auspiciousness of the touch of the feet of the devotees would ever be his. The steps outside the eastern entrance are known as 'Kulasekhara Pati' (step) also.*



*Deeparadhana* done with camphor as the medium as against all others which resort to wicks and oil, implies a weighty spiritual secret. Camphor leaves behind no residue. Once it is burnt out it merges into nothingness. In the same manner when ego or I consciousness burns itself out in the fire of *Bhakti* (divine devotion), the complete fusion of the individual bonded soul called *Jeevatma* with the universal unbonded soul, the *Paramatma*, takes place. The "I" aspect ceases and the "You" aspect (ie. God) alone exists. This is indeed a beautiful and elevated concept.

The six *Vahanas* used in the Temple come in for particular mention. They represent the six *Chakras* (ചക്രങ്ങൾ/ഛന്ദാധാരങ്ങൾ) with Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself being the supreme dominating force equated with the *Sahasradala Padmam*. The *Simhasana Vahanam* denotes *Mooladharam* (മൂലധാരം), *Ananta-Swadhishthanam* (സ്വാധിഷ്ഠാനം), *Kamala-Manipoorakam* (മണിപൂരകം), *Pallakku-Anahatham* (അനാഹതം), *Garuda-Visudhi* (വിശുദ്ധി) and *Indra-Ajnachakram* (ആജ്ഞാചക്രം).

Another interesting conclusion is derived about the nature of the long-existing priestly order. *Dvaitam* (duality) is represented by the Tulu Brahmins *Akkara* and *Ikkara Desies*, *Advaitam* (non-duality) by the Tantries and *Visishta Advaitam* (qualified non-duality) by the Swamiyar. This is an application of the three schools of philosophy through them, not a definition of their own standing as the Swamiyar like all Namboodiries is a basic *Advaiti*.

A temple is compared to the human body and different aspects of its construction relate to the various parts of the physical framework of man. In this manner the sanctum sanctorum is variously compared to the head or the heart, the circumambulatory path around the main shrine where some major divinities are installed is the face, the platform where *Vedas* and prayers are chanted is the throat, the inner walls enclosing these areas are the arms and the breast, the outer corridors with subsidiary Deities stand for the stomach, the outer walls are the knees and the ankles (and also indicate the external limit of the physical form). Last but not least, the tower or *Gopuram* with the main entrance, the feet of the Lord.<sup>10</sup> The flag mast takes the place of the spinal chord through which the *Kundalini Sakthi* traverses upward. As such the raising of the flag symbolically activating this power is a very significant ritual.

Spirituality, its significance and symbolism are subjects within the orbit of scholars. What has been detailed here falls within the many limitations of the author's thinking and knowledge and the imperfections and differences in interpretations may be viewed with toleration.

10. *Madhavji - Kshetra Chaithanya Rahasyam*.



## 7

## AUTOGRAPH OF AGES

Ancient History of  
The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple

While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact time when the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was consecrated there is no doubt about its great age and ancient character. Earliest known records of this Temple appear in the Epics and the *Puranas* including those relating to Lord Krishna, which date to aeons before Christ. Subsequent religious and historical literature as well as literary works have made mention of this Temple in many places. Since it assumes the nature of an abode of God with its origin in unrecorded antiquity, the ancient history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple necessarily is somewhat obscure. The Indian attitude towards history also contributed to this state of affairs. It was held that a historical approach was coloured with material hues and so the recording of events was done mainly in story form utilising mythology and the *Puranas* as the basis. Dates and years were not given prominence as the ancients felt that time being infinite need not be or should not be compressed into the constraints of measurement which is finite.

Yet from the materials at hand two aspects are clear: (1) It was always considered as a *Maha Kshetram*. This greatness was not a process of evolution but was there from the very inception of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. (2) Barring *Puranic* references, its royal associations down the ages had placed this Temple on a separate pedestal.

Touching on the first point of its inherent famed sanctity, let us recall what the *Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam* of 343 ME/1168 AD proclaims. "Pushkara was sacred in *Krita Yugam*. Naimisaranya in *Thretha Yugam*, Kurukshetra in *Dwapara Yugam* and Syanandoora in *Kali Yugam*." Profound books have recorded and venerable sages have sung in full-throated praise of



this Temple and its Lord. The *Brahmanda Puranam* repeatedly mentions Syanandoorapura and its Lord, *Syanandoora Purusha*. Certain texts put the age of this Temple to immediately after the advent of the Age of Kali, 950th day of Kali i.e. 5095 years ago, while others attribute *Dwapara Yugam* as the era. There are many other references in ancient literature, but this is dealt with in a separate chapter under the heading *Search of Sources*.

With regard to the second point indicating the special status of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, before embarking on it, let us briefly travel back in time to the mythological period which has reached the present through oral tradition. As it touches on the Travancore Royal Family's ancient antecedents, it becomes relevant due to the inalienable divine bondage the centuries had crafted, binding this Temple and this Royal house which proclaimed Sree Padmanabha Swamy residing in the said Temple as its family Deity and tutelary Deity. As such, the destiny of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and this dynasty variously known as Chera Vamsham, Thrippappoor Swaroopam, Vanchi Raja Vamsham, Venad, and Travancore Royal Family constituting one of the major ruling dynasties of India, inevitably overlap.

As described in the ancient texts and also in the *Hari Vamsham*, thirty second chapter, the royal lines of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas are elaborated.<sup>1</sup> They are recorded as having descended from three Soma Vamsha Kshatriya brothers. The Cheras were the ancestors of the Royal Family of Travancore.

There is the legend of the Soma Vamsha Kshatriya Prince from the east coast named Bhanu Vikraman who was crowned King of Kerala at Sreevardhanapuram by Parasurama, the 6th incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, his brother Udaya Varma was crowned at Gokarnam (S. Canara) to rule over the Chera territory of Kolathunadu. Parasurama instituted the *Hiranyagarbham*, *Thulapurusha Danam*, and *Mahamakom*. The Kulasekhara Perumal (of Travancore region) was given the first place.

The *Bhavishyat Puranam* (which prophesies the future) predicts the end of the Kshatriya rule of both the races with the exception of the Soma Vamsha Kings of Kerala, the Cholas and Cheras. It also gives a detailed account of the Chera, Chola, Pandya dynasties. The Chera links with the Temple being what they were, the existence of the Temple even then is supported by these narrations.

According to the scholar of repute Dr. L.A. Ravi Varma of Lakshmipuram Palace, Changanacherry, the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy was consecrated on the first day of the Age of Kali. If so, it possesses a grand age of over five thousand years.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. P. Shangoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*.
  2. Original version of Keralolpathi and V. Nagam Aiya, *The State Manual of Travancore*.
  3. T.N. Gopinathan Nair, *Punya Sankethangal*.



*Anantasayana Mahatmyam* from *Brahmanda Puranam* records the consecration of *Syanandoora Purusha* by Sage Divakara as the 950th the date of the Kali era.

## The Royal connections

Reverting to the special status of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, it can be said that its history mirrored the evolution of the region but its royal connections expanded its sway to geographical peripheries far away from it. Thirunelveli District, for example, was for very long under the different dynasties who ruled over this region and consequently came under the shade of this Temple. Many are the historical records that prove this. The oldest known royal connections based on history were with the Ay Kings, who, according to some Tamil scholars like Professors Jesudasan, are given a time slot of three centuries before Christ. The present Royal Family traces its origin to the Ays (as well as to the Chera emperors). It is interesting to recollect that the royal emblem of the Ays was the elephant. This has continued along with the conch as the emblem of the Royal State of Travancore till the abolition of monarchy and is used by the Kerala State with alterations as its seal to this day.

The Ays ruled considerable portions of the southern region of Kerala though varied opinions exist on the actual territorial definition. This dynasty held the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in great esteem and it received their official patronage and particular attention in the conduct of Temple matters.

Likewise the Cheras of ancient lineage, the rulers of Venad, the Kulasekhara Perumals who much later on added the distinctive title of honour as *Sree Padmanabha Dasas* all had, in the far off past itself, indivisible links with this ancient Temple and its presiding Deity, the tutelary Deity of the ruling houses. It is interesting to note that in the Volume titled *Thirtha, The Treasury of Indian-Expressions* published by C.M.C. Ltd. under the chairmanship of Dr. P.P. Gupta and edited by Vijay Ghosh, the Tamil Confederation of 414 BC comprising the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas is dwelt upon. Though this broke up consequent on warfare with Kalinga, these three kingdoms independently grew and became the most prosperous and culturally rich in South India. They were famed for their vast trade links in the earlier periods. During their evolution the Cheras came to be known as *Keralaputhras* also. Thus as far as the Chera connections go, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple gets a very ancient place on the time graph.

Both the Ay Kings and the Venad rulers have referred to Sree Padmanabha Swamy as *Yadavendrakuladaivam*. In his book professor Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai quotes this term to underline his stand that the Ays were of Yadava stock (*Chila Kerala Charitra Presnangal*). This underscores the claim of many of the dynasties that exerted authority over this land including the Travancore



Royal Family which trace descent from the *Chandra Vamsham*, the Yadava dynasty of Lord Krishna. They were not the Yadava cowherds but the lauded Yadava Kshatriyas.

The Venad kings also used this term *Yadavendrakuladaivam* in the worship of their family Deity, Sree Padmanabha Swamy. It is to be noted here that the first known great King of Venad was Ayyan Adigal Thiruvadigal who made Thiruvattar his stronghold. This place had its own Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple — the ancient Sree Adi Kesava Perumal Temple. These kings had the title *Vanchiyar Kulapathi* as is known from the old inscription in that area.<sup>4</sup> The antiquity of the Venad kings is again illustrated by a Brahmi inscription in the Marukalthala Hill, Thirunelveli District, in the 3rd century BC.<sup>5</sup> It is stated that Kasyapa of Venad constructed caves for the use of Jain monks. This appears to be the earliest mention of Venad. The point made here is that if connections were there with this Temple during that time, its origin dates even further back.

We need not enter into a discussion on the sovereignty or seniority of these dynasties on the political ladder nor need we try to unravel the exact relations they had with the Temple. Suffice it to mention these ancient houses worshipped Sree Padmanabha Swamy with deep reverence either as the *Kula Daivam* (dynastic Deity) or as *Ishta Daivam* (God of personal choice). As such, the affairs of the Temple and the affairs of the Throne became interwoven with the Temple superseding the throne by right of divine might. Thus the continued influence exerted by the Temple not only in the spiritual sphere but in the political arena as well was of the utmost significance and contributed to the shaping of events to come. The regal association where the presiding Deity is paramount seems to be unique not only in the temple history of India but in the religious history of the world where both religion and politics are involved.

From olden days 108 famed Maha Vishnu temples have been identified and acclaimed as so many *Thiruppathies* of *Bharatha Varsham* by the Alvars. Two out of the 108 no longer exist on earth but are said to be now in heaven. Though the boundaries of India were very wide in those days, it is indeed important and interesting to note that not even one of these 106 great abodes of God was located in an area which centuries later became separated from the original land mass of India. Thus they all remain in modern India itself adding to the sanctity of these sacred sands. Of the 106 *Thiruppathies*, thirteen were found in Malayala Nadu or the land of the Malayalam-speaking people. Following the re-organisation of the States of India, two have been lost to Tamil Nadu, thereby reducing the number of these temples to eleven. The Temple of the Lord of Thiruvananthapuram, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, is one

4. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. VI - 352

5. Dr. A.G. Menon - '*History of the Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758*'.



among them. Much, much later in the modern times the great Vaishnavite saint from Bengal, Sree Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, hailed Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as one among the six *Narayana Sthalas* or seats of Sree Narayana Bhagavan, in Bharatham.

From the historical and religious view point, the site which currently bears this Temple has been identified as one of the oldest inhabited areas of South India. First century classical writers like Ptolemy and the anonymous author of the Peri Plus (Mari Erythrea) refer to the land as that lying south of Nelcynda or extending from Baris, identified as the Pampa, upto Kanyakumari. Scholars pinpoint this area as the land from Varkala or from Thiruvalla southwards, which was the domain of the Ay Kings, whose association with and abiding faith in Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is an accepted fact, re-emphasising its great age and the area of its geographical location. The Ays had to face constant threat of war from many people including from the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas. The Cheras are said to have risen in power only after Ay Andiran and Atiyan and the eclipse of the power of the Ay dynasty.<sup>6</sup> The Chola Kings who apparently did not share the devotion of the Ays, the Cheras and Venad rulers for this Temple, attacked this territory many times. Legend has it that one of the Chola kings came right up to the Temple, may be with the intention of establishing his supremacy, but, on entering the Temple, he got into such bewilderment that instead of his conquest he was conquered by the glory of the Lord and left the Temple unharmed, as a devotee, after offering vessels of gold to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Many Chola attacks and repeated destruction of *Kandalloor Salai*, the famed centre for instruction and martial arts, known as 'the Nalanda of the South', especially in the reign of King Rajaraja Chola, 925-1016 AD. (Some historians put his period as 985-1016 AD eg. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai) had serious repercussions on the Ay power; but the Temple continued to remain inviolate. Another instance of devotion to this Temple by the Tamil invaders was the offering of ten gold lamps sporting exquisite workmanship submitted by Paranthaka Pandyan, vassal of King Kulothunga Cholan I after a mission of war.

## The Rise of the First Chera Empire

Vikramaditya Varaguna's reign was the swan-song as far as the Ays were concerned, It was an action-packed period with determined struggles between the Pandyas and the Cholas for political supremacy over South India. Despite all this, the King found time and resources for the temples. The famous Palyam Copper Plates issued from Kollam are standing examples of his religious tolerance. After Varaguna's reign, in about 925 AD, the Ays declined rapidly and finally merged themselves in the Chera empire by the 10th century AD

6. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon.



(Perhaps this process was made easier due to the fact that even during political struggles, intermarriages were not uncommon between the royal houses).

Another theory about the Ay amalgamation revolves round a branch of the Ays who had set up residence at Thrippappoor, ten miles north of Thiruvananthapuram. From there they had been controlling the affairs of the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the tutelary Deity of the Ay Kings. The branch is said to have merged with the Keezhperur branch of the House of Venad which, during that time, *i.e.* 9th century, controlled only a comparatively small geographical territory.<sup>7</sup> A good majority of the later kings hailed from this House of Venad. The slow disappearance of the Ays as a great political force coincided with the emergence of the Cheras as one of the prominent political powers in that region along with the rulers of Venad, who needed a couple of centuries more for the full flowering of their political might. A brief survey into the history of the Chera emperors will not be out of place due to their strong bonds with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the role defined for them by destiny in Temple-related matters once more, when the Chera empire took birth again hundreds of years later as the Second Chera Empire. The established ancient antecedents of the Cheras from undated eras of time assume significance as the antiquity of this Temple and the Travancore House, which traces its descent from the Cheras after the Ay amalgamation, are involved.

By the time of Andavan Cheran, 100 AD, or even earlier, the Cheras were busy consolidating their position. Well before this period a king by name Ezham or Ezhani Attan had been described as *Vanchiyar Kulapathi* or *Keralabhoobhrit* as is seen in an old 3rd century BC inscription.<sup>8</sup> He came to Thiruvattar from the main Chera line and is the earliest known ruler of the said dynasty in this area. The titles of that king are significant as they underline the strong Chera connections with Kerala. The ruler and his line fit in with the time-honoured traditions of the present Travancore Royal Family. The similarity is more than accidental. Even the titles commonly used by these two royalties but by no other dynasties, support the oneness of the Cheras and Travancore. The Cheras' name and fame had spread and in the Edicts, of Ashoka Maurya of the 3rd century BC<sup>9</sup> the Chera's are referred to as 'independent'. As in the case of the Venad Lords, Thiruvattar and its ancient Vishnu Temple were prominent in the Chera rule too. Ancient Tamil literature (which is dealt with separately in detail in the chapter *Search of Sources*) also makes direct or indirect mention of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. In the Tamil work *Pathittu Pathu* which is

7. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – *A Survey of Kerala History*.

8. Prof. K.K. Pillai – *Studies in the History of India with special Reference to Tamil Nadu*, p-492, Ezhani Attan is described as *Sangam celebrity with seat at Thiruvattar*.

9. *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. 6 as seen in the *Travancore Dictionary* 1938 p-107.



now put around 2nd century AD by Tamil scholars, it speaks of King Kalankaikanni Naarmudi Cheran (100-125 AD) and of the Vishnu Temple and the God *Selvan*, who is surmised to be Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Syanandooram.<sup>10</sup> While differences of opinion exist on this issue, inferences point out that it is this Temple that is pictured here. The work elaborates on the grand *Arat* procession of the Lord to the seashore. It must be remembered that this one aspect alone is sufficient to prove the point that the Temple in question is the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram and not the Temple of Sree Adi Kesava Perumal at Thiruvattar as the latter area does not possess a sea shore. *Chilappathikaram*, the famous post-Sangam Tamil epic written by Ilankovadikal, a Chera Prince, also refers to the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and to the *Prasadam* brought from there for the Saivite Pandyan King, who accepted the same with great reverence.

Intermingling of names and titles and performance of certain functions between the Thiruvattar – based Cheras and the Thiruvananthapuram – based Ays appear frequently, establishing a common bond which paved the way for the fusion of the two lines ultimately. The rulers of Venad who are akin to Chera in descent<sup>11</sup> and who hailed from the Vanchi Raja Vamsham (or the Royal Family of Vanchi Nadu) were very particular about the upkeep of the Thiruvattar Temple even after the political stronghold had shifted out of that area. Cadjan records at Thiruvattar Temple show that the *Patiyettam* ceremony of Travancore Rulers, which was necessary for their installation on the Throne, would be first performed at Thiruvattar and then at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram.

## The Second Chera Empire and its Links of Devotion

The long 'historical night' following the Sangam Age and the dissolution of the Chera Empire which had been a power to be reckoned with from about the 1st century AD was the 'dark period' in the history of this land covering the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries. This was a time when Kerala suffered under the onslaught of different invading armies. The revival of Chera power took place under Kulasekhara Varman about the end of the 8th century AD. The Second Chera Empire was also known as the Kulasekhara Empire and was blessed with a line of thirteen illustrious rulers having their capital at Thiruvanchikulam or Mahodayapuram (today's Kodungalloor). It was the golden age of the land, as well as an age of great heroism, due to warfare especially during the latter half of the century.

Even from very ancient times *Hiranyagarbham* and *Thulapurusha Danam*, which were two complex and important royal ceremonies, were found to be

10. M. Raghava Aiyangar – *Some Aspects of Kerala and Tamil Literature*.

11. *The 13th & last King of the second Chera Empire became the first King of the new Venad Dynasty*.



popular. In the Kali Year 3831/731 AD, Veera Marthanda Varma is seen to have performed them both.<sup>12</sup> He was succeeded by Udaya Marthanda Varma of Venad in the Kali Year 3902/802 AD.<sup>13</sup> There is a difference in opinion about the name of this King. Some state that it was Koda / Kotha Marthanda Varma. By that time five branches of the Royal Family co-existed having independent royal status. They were collectively styled as Venad, Thiruvitamcode or Thrippappoor.

Sree Udaya Marthanda Varma was a highly erudite and accomplished monarch. In the Kali Year 3926/825 AD<sup>14</sup> when he was in residence at Kollam, he convened a council of all the learned men of the land with the object of introducing a new era after making some astronomical researches and calculating the solar movements through the 12 signs of the Zodiac and counting scientifically the number of days involved in this revolution in every month. It was resolved to adopt the new era from the 1st of *Chingom* of that year, (15th August 825) as the 1st Kollam Year and to call it the solar year. Thus the beginning of the new Malayalam era was the greatest gift of the King to the land. Five days later, on the 5th of *Chingom* of the first Malayalam era (825 AD) the King, the heads of the five branches (including his own), the ecclesiastical head i.e. the Swamiyar, and the feudal lords who were the nobility, all met in conclave in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and framed rules and ordinances for the conduct of the daily, monthly and yearly *Pujas* and other ceremonies of the Temple.<sup>15</sup> These rules by and large are still in force in this Temple. (Certain facts on the Kollam era are given in the note below).<sup>16</sup> An event of extreme importance took place on 5th *Chingom* (August) Ist ME on Friday under the asterism *Thiru Onam*. The idol of Lord Krishna brought by the Krishnavamsakar from Gujarat was consecrated in the presence of those already mentioned above. The new temple bore the same name as the one in Gujarat — '*Thiru Ampati*'.

---

12. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon — '*A Survey of Kerala History*'.

13. 1. P. Shangoonny Menon — '*A History of Travancore*'.  
2. *Temple Manual*

14. 1. P. Shangoonny Menon — '*A History of Travancore*'.  
2. *Temple Manual*.

15. 1. *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Manual*.  
2. P. Shangoonny Menon — '*A History of Travancore*'.

16. The exact date of commencement of the Kollam era is a disputed issue. Apart from the date, a claim circulated that the Kollam Era was the brain-child of North Kollam (in North Kerala). This has been refuted on the grounds:

1. Five days after the formation of the year the five Swaroopam heads met at Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. North Kollam was too far away those days to enable this to take place.
2. The new era was immediately accepted in Tamil Nadu (South) which borders Venad.
3. Malabar Year starts on Kanni Ist, not Chingom Ist, in the areas of the North.



In this line of illustrious rulers, Bhaskara Ravi Varma III (225 ME/1050 AD) deserves special mention. This 'Cheraman Perumal' is said to have carried out the first known renovation of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>17</sup> He introduced a constitution for the Temple which exists to this day without much basic alteration. A council was also formed, the forerunner of the *Ettara Yogam* of the later years.<sup>18</sup> He appointed functionaries for the different duties of the Temple. This King was such a great devotee of Sree Padmanabha Swamy that people regarded him as an incarnation of Maha Vishnu.

This period of the second Cheras also produced one out of the 12 great Vaishnavite saints called Alvars and one out of the 63 great Saivite saints termed *Nayanars* and both these saints were Chera Kings. Their glories are sung to this day especially in Tamil Nadu. The matrilineal system of family descent came into vogue from the 11th century and is followed even now by the Travancore Royal Family. Kulasekhara Varma alias Kulasekhara Alvar (800-820 AD) was a great devotee of Vishnu and poured his *Bhakti* or devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy in his literary works like the famous *Mukunda Mala* and in his commitment to the Temple till his abdication and onward spiritual journey. Rajasekhara Varman famed as Cheraman Perumal Nayanar (around 820-844 AD) was an avowed Siva devotee with mystic powers. There is a view point that he lived in the eighth century. Rama Varma Kulasekhara (265-277 ME/1090-1102 AD), 13th in the line, seems to have shifted the headquarters from Mahodayapuram to Kollam due to various reasons. He was the last of the famed Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram and a great ruler who ensured peace for the land from the constant threats of Chola invasion by quelling them effectively. He was also known as Rama Varma *Koil Adhikarikal* Kulasekhara or Ramar Thiruvadi. The term *Koil Adhikarikal* is of great importance as it illustrates the value given to the preservation of the temples which was of such high degree as to frame this duty in the form of a *Birudam* or title. He was the first to assume<sup>19</sup> the title of *Kulasekhara Perumal* after the performance of *Hiranyagarbham* and *Thulapurusha Danam*. It is reasonable to assume that these rites, by their very elaborate nature and significance, were performed only in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple with its significant dynastic connections with the Cheras. More over, it had long been the religious capital of the land. Successive rulers of Travancore also continued to use this title including the last Maharaja of Travancore to rule the land from 1931-1949 AD, Sree Padmanabha Dasa Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma. Ramar Thiruvadi's reign witnessed the end of the Kulasekhara Empire and signalled the rise of Venad as an independent Kingdom with imperial status being conferred upon

17. 1. Mathilakam Manual.

2. Dr. V.S. Sharma - 'Tiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham'.

18. P. Shangoonny Menon - 'A History of Travancore'.

19. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon - 'A Survey of Kerala History'.



the kings. He is hence regarded as the real founder of the Venad Kingdom. For this dynasty of power too, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple continued to be paramount as the Temple of the family Deity of the rulers of the land.

## Venad Rulers

By this time, another significant trend had surfaced in the rise of the influence of the Namboodiri-Brahmin community. The Rameswarathukoil inscription of Kollam (1102 AD) shows that under the pressure of *Uralars* certain lands were granted to this Temple in Kollam as an act of penance for the sin of offending these Namboodiries. This is of great importance as it marks the position of power gained by them in the State. This power found its strong echo in the affairs of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple also in course of time.

It has already been observed briefly that the Venad family had its roots in the hoary past, but had enjoyed only restricted royal control over a limited area. Fortune swung in their direction with Ramar Thiruvadi for the *Venaders* as the Venad rulers were commonly referred to. Their supremacy was fully established briefly but from the 12th century AD<sup>20</sup> they seemed to have faded away, with the Kulasekharas becoming the Venad Kings. Veera Kerala Varma or Kotha Kerala Varma was crowned King and assumed the title of *Kiritapati* or *Kulasekhara Perumal*. Records give him the time span between 300-330ME/1125-1155AD.<sup>21</sup> This King re-built parts of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as the second known renovation during the years 302-326 ME/1127-1151AD. His capital was Sreevazhumkodu. Thereafter, the capital again shifted and became Kollam.

In 343 ME/1168 AD, Veera Adithya Varma of Venad was in power. He made lavish contributions to the Sree Mitranandapuram Temples in Thiruvananthapuram which formed part of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as its *Keezheedom*. The copper plate in the *Mutt* attached to this Temple belongs to this ruler's time and is attributed to one Suvakaran Manian who must have been the Brahmin representative of the King. On behalf of the King, he set up the *Mandapam* of this Temple and the idol of Lord Krishna and made many gifts like *Salagramas*, gold elephant-marked coins, paddy and so on which are all recorded. This Deed was witnessed by one Kesavan Damodaran of Tarananalloor, the long - time Tantri family of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Sree Mithranandapuram Temple. The appointment as Tantri seems to be subsequent (as noted from Temple records) but this illustrates that this family had a position of consequence in Temple - related matters even then.

20. T.K. Velu Pillai - 'Travancore State Manual'.

21. 1. 'Syanandoorapurana Samuchayam' - 343 ME/1168 AD.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon - 'A Survey of Kerala History'.



During the reign of Sree Udaya Marthanda Varma or Kotha Marthanda Varma, prompted by his great devotion to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the King moved to a Palace in Thiruvananthapuram in 354 ME/1179 AD. The famous and highly informative Sanskrit work by his own Court Poet titled *Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam* was first recited to him and then dedicated to the Lord by order of the King.<sup>22</sup> He also made many gifts of land to the Temple.

The Thiruvayambati inscription dated 371 ME/1196AD mentions an officer of this king who was a great devotee by name Adithyarama who donated a magnificent silver drum to the Thiru Ampati Krishna shrine in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple complex along with an investment with the *Nambies* (high priests) for enabling them to procure 60 *paras* (a measure) of paddy for daily *Nivedyam*.<sup>23</sup> The drum beater's wages in paddy too were provided for. In the event of default for the third time, the Council should be notified and penalty imposed on the defaulters. A cooking vessel was also donated in the presence of the Council of dignitaries (the *Sabha* of *Uralars*) including the *Samajika* or *Sabhanjitha* (accountant.) This Council used to meet regularly under the direct control of the king to decide on all matters of Temple administration.

According to certain scholars, the institution of the Swamiyar presiding over the Council in the administrative capacity originated during this period, but it is not a proven fact supported by records. The Pushpanjali Swamiyar as the chief religious functionary in the affairs of the Temple dates further back.

From the 11th century onwards, it is seen that the Council or *Sabha* was slowly gaining in prominence and power though there was no conflict at that time. It would meet on occasions of importance in the Sree Mithranandapuram Temple about a furlong to the west of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>24</sup> Like many other temples of that time, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple had its own *Uralars* and its own *Sabhanjitha*. This Council was probably the progenitor of the later *Ettara Yogam*. The venue became Sree Mithranandapuram Temple, perhaps due to the necessary presence of the Swamiyar and the *Nambies* whose movements were greatly restricted as per tradition. The kings also expended much money and attention on this Temple. As such, the two Temples were interlinked and the connections continue to this day.

22. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

23. 1. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.

3. T.A.S. Volume III.

24. Statement by Prof. P. Sundaram Pillai and included in the State Manual of Travancore by V. Nagam Aiya.



Ramar Kerala Varma's Thiruvananthapuram inscription issued at Mithranandapuram lays down many directives and bears testimony to this system of administration.<sup>25</sup> The inscription records a gift of land by one Pallavarajan, perhaps an officer of this King, in the presence of the Swamiyar, the *Sabha* and the *Sabhanjitha*. It also lists a number of fields, compounds, house sites and gardens as gifts made over to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The cultivators were bound to submit the said quantity of good paddy needed for the daily *Nivedyam* for the Lord. The unit of measurement was interestingly known as *Perumal-parai*. Provision was made also for the feeding of one Brahmin and for special Brahmin feeding. The flower gardens known as Nandavanam were to be maintained for supply of the prescribed flowers for daily *Puja* or worship to the Temple. In case of default the Temple authorities were empowered to resort to forcible recovery.

This King was also known as Devadaran Kerala Varma. His reign has been recorded as 384-389 ME/1209-1214 AD by some scholars while others put it as 380-390 ME/1205-1215 AD.

The Thiruvallom Temple too came under the control of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Thiruvallom river and the *Pithru Teertham* of that Temple were both *Teerthas* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. King Ravi Kerala Varma (390-415 ME/1215-1240 AD) was a great devotee and bestowed personal attention on the affairs of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. His reign registers gifts in perpetuity of 217 *paras* of 'good paddy' and 'good ghee' and *Talaikanam*, a levy received from Nigamattur to the deity of Thiruvallom.<sup>26</sup>

By this time the Royal Family had resided in many places and as a result the five *Thavazhies* (branches) of yore continued to flourish<sup>27</sup> as before as Venad, Thiruvitancode, Thrippappoor. Chiravayi and Desinganad (Quilon), collectively known as Thrippappoor or Thiruvithamkotu or Venad with the rulership vesting only with Venad, Thrippappoor and Thiruvithamkotu. Some scholars put forth the claim that the five branches were Chiravayi, Thrippappoor (or Attingal), Kallikku or Cheytangad or Desinganad (Kollam), Pokkattali and Kunnummel *Illom*. They became more inter-related through adoptions and family engagements.<sup>28</sup> The Venad ruler got the title of *Chiravayi Mooppan* (though

25. 1. T.A.S. Vol. IV.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.

26. T.A.S. Vol. III.

27. 1. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758'.

2. Dr. V.S. Sharma – 'Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham'.

3. P. Shangoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

28. M. Raja Raja Varma Raja – Some Travancore Dynastic Records published in Kerala Society Paper.



the *Chiravayi* branch was apparently excluded from actual rulership). It is held by some that the term *Chiravayi* itself reveals the amalgamation of two great lines of rulers - Chera + Ay, and hence that term was given the place of utmost honour by the dynasties. The *Elayaraja* who was next in line got the designation of *Thrippappoor Mooppan*. The distinct responsibility of administering all temples in general and the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in particular vested with the *Thrippappoor Mooppan*.<sup>29</sup> The choice of the ruler seems to have been resolved based on the seniority of age among the members of these branches and this personage assumed the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'. The next in line also had considerable powers as is seen often in the overlapping of names during the same period on important issues and events.

The geographical location of the capital is seen to have shifted from place to place bowing to the dictates of circumstances and conveniences. Vizhingam, Thiruvattar, Mahodayapuram with its lauded Chera connections, Thiruvattar, Kollam, Kalkulam which was the Padmanabhapuram of the future, were all capitals at one time or the other. There is a disputed view that during a certain time frame.<sup>30</sup> Thiruvananthapuram with special reference to Vanchiyoar was also briefly the capital though records confer this status in full on this city only in the time of Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma in the mid Seventeen Hundreds.<sup>31</sup> (It may not be too much of a digression to mention that Vizhingam was the capital even by early 10th century AD. The Madras Museum Plates record Vizhingam as the capital of the Ay Kingdom. The Trivandrum Stone Inscription bears evidence that though Vizhingam fell into enemy hands, ten years later, the Ay Kings who had continued their fight for it, finally won their victory.)

The *Thrippappoor Mooppan* of the 15th century seems to have shifted to Thiruvithamcode and later, with the completion of the *Darpakulangara Palace* at Kalkulam, that became the royal seat. Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma the Great (904-933 ME/1729-1758 AD) rebuilt the Palace and renamed it as the *Padmanabhapuram Palace*. The area had come to be known as Padmanabhapuram by then. Even the act of re-naming it thus, illustrates the depth of devotion of the Maharaja to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The capital of Travancore continued where it was after the *Thrippati Danam* also, though it was the Maharaja's intention to shift it to Thiruvananthapuram to be near to the Temple and to the Lord of his destiny. In the last decade of the 18th century, in Dharmaraja's time, the capital became Thiruvananthapuram though the secretariat functioning at Kollam was shifted to this city only during the reign of Sree Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma.

29. R.V. Poduval - 'The Royal House of Travancore'.

30. Dr. V.S. Sharma - 'Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham'.

31. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon - 'A Survey of Kerala History'.



In the chapter on the ancient history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the author has digressed into areas of pure history occasionally. This was done with the intention of underscoring the antiquity of this great Temple, its continuing undeniable emotional and historical links with the renowned ruling houses even from the distant horizons of the far past and the tremendous influence exerted by this royal Abode of God on the fortunes of this land and the dynasties that dominated it.

Next comes the medieval era of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which not only stood witness to but participated in epoch-making events — to creation of history itself.

## Medieval History of The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple

The ruling dynasties of this land had, by a legacy of devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, consciously or unconsciously placed the Temple in a position of paramount prominence on the religious and then political map of the domain they ruled. While it is not easy to compartmentalise the different ages as past and medieval due to the continuity of the generations, a rough cut-off point has been arrived at starting with the glorious reign of the mighty Emperor Sangramadheera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (474-488ME/1299-1313AD), which was an epoch-making era in the fortunes of these sands, leaving its signature on the history of South India itself.

The details in this chapter were obtained from manuals and books of reference and historical works of established historians as well as from individuals but the bulk of data was naturally derived from the published and unpublished records and hand-written manuals of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple seen in the *Grantha-pura* of the Temple and in the State Archives.

It was in 600 ME/1425 AD that the then King Veera Iravi Iravi Varma commanded that the *Mathilakam* Records, as the Temple records are known, be brought together and that a record room be constructed to house them within the Temple compound itself. By this he was rendering an act of service to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and to posterity itself, the worth of which is hard to assess fully.

These chronicles of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are universally famed for their singular antiquity and historical value. This *Grantha-pura* is reputed to be the biggest and greatest of its kind not only in Kerala but in India itself. The *Granthas* made up of cadjan leaves known as *Churunas*, (ചുരുണ്ടുകൾ) written mostly in *Vattezhuthu* (വട്ടെഴുത്ത്) and *Kolezhuthu* (കോലെഴുത്ത്), *Granthavari*, Tamil and archaic Malayalam come under seventy heads. These



scrolls are a treasure house of information not only about the total concept of the Temple and other related temples but about the practical evolution of Malayalam language, history, administration, customs, tradition and political climate as well, of the different periods pertaining to the State. Scholars hold the view that if these chronicles are correctly deciphered they would possibly provide such valuable knowledge about this region that even South Indian history could take on a new image and colour. It is an unfortunate fact that many of the chronicles remain unread and unregistered though a good many have been re-recorded and listed in common language in published or unpublished form in what could be termed as a labour of love and scholastic endeavour. This is because the physical bulk of the *Churunas* makes the task of unravelling them awesome indeed. To give a general idea, there are at least three thousand bundles of records pertaining to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, containing over thousand cadjan records in each bundle, thus totalling to a formidable thirty lakh documents! Expertise, time and expense are all involved. Maybe the number rose to such proportions due to the ingrained conservatism, respect for procedure and precedent and attachment to age-old custom, shared by the various kings, which contributed in turn to an elaborate and meticulous system of in-depth recording of even the minutest details and events. This laborious process has proved to be a great blessing in preserving the State's legacy through these priceless scrolls.

These records have also served as documents of reference time over when doubt or conflict of opinion arose, and they traverse a whole canvas of issues. When there was a clash of interests between two factions on the appointment of the Panchagavyathu Nambi in 771 ME/1596AD, the records were consulted and a quick decision arrived at. Once a *Potti* (Brahmin Priest) fell into a well in the Temple and met with his end; the purification process to be adopted and the effect on daily worship were resolved based on what these *Churunas* revealed. Significant too is the role they play in vital issues like adoption. The earliest recorded adoption seems to be in the time of Veera Rama Udaya Marthanda Varma. The records acted as the final authority as late as 986 ME/1810 AD when a serious dispute arose on the matter of succession between Kerala Varma of Mavelikkara Palace and Gouri Lakshmi Bayi adopted from *Kola Swaroopam*, when Kerala Varma raised a claim to the Throne. Col. Monroe finally resolved the deadlock, after a careful scrutiny of the Temple records, in favour of the Rani. They proved to be the basis for initiating action against erring officials.

The pilgrimage of Sree Sankaracharya and offering of *Kanikka* to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple too are on record. (*Churuna* 7, *Olas* 106- 109, year 1049 ME/1874 AD). The registers reveal a continuous flow of visitors from long back to now including not only important personalities but common



people also. Religious heads, Hindu representatives of Nawab Mohammed Ali of Arcot and the British Government, rulers of Kashi, Nepal, Vijayanagaram, Neeleswaram, Cochin, Kozhicode, Pudukottai, Kashmir, Mysore, Gwalior etc., dignitaries from many other places, the *Azhuvancheri Thamprakkal* (the acknowledged hereditary head of the Namboodiries) and others are seen to have paid their homage during different time-frames, down the ages. In the book *A History of the Sikh People* (1469-1988) by Dr. Gopal Singh, there is a mention of Guru Nanak's visit to Tilaganji Temple on his way either to or from Rameswaram. Opinions differ on whether the temple mentioned was Thiruvattar Sree Adi Kesava or Thiruvananthapuram Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

These scrolls cover areas of administration including revenue, tax levy and recovery, land levy, legal and political issues etc. purchase of horses, treatment of camels, horses and elephants, trade dealings with the Dutch, agreements with other foreign powers, concessions granted to other religions, penalties imposed on royalty for alleged excesses, lists of ornaments, details of the multiplicity of offerings made by the Royal Family, dependants and others, land endowments, festivals, rituals and codes of conduct as per custom and tradition. They are all dealt with in an exhaustive manner beyond doubt in these hoards of records. Instructions for making gold *Viswa Chakram*, details of the *Navagrahas* and other Deities with their special features are elaborated (*Churuna 27, Ola 175 Mathilakam Records*). Compensations given to dependants of persons who perished in war or in discharge of duties, corrective measures imposed on misbehaving employees including the Periya Nambi and miracles witnessed in the Temple figure in them. From these we see that many are the type of honours as well as titles, land, money, rice etc., bestowed on a large number of persons as rewards for services. A very important one deals with social reform and social justice extended to the lower castes of that period, enacted during the reign of Jayasimha Deva of Venad in 661 ME/1486 AD. It allowed full privileges to low caste people to use public wells and tanks, assured impartial justice, prohibited molestation of low castes by upper castes on penalty of punishment etc.<sup>32</sup> This stands in great credit for the early Sovereigns of Travancore whose enlightened rule spanned five centuries, though sufficient credit was not given to them in later years. In the time of Marthanda Varma the Great we see many positions of honour conferred on Ezhavas who came from a lower community. Another record states the fine imposed on the Temple servants for scalding the mouths of the Namboodiri Brahmins who had come to participate in the *Murajapam* functions of the Temple, by serving them *Jeera* water during meal time which was too hot.<sup>33</sup> Another one states the fine imposed

32. 1. *Pillar Inscription of Parasurama Perunteru in Kottar.*

2. *V. Nagam Aiya – The State Manual of Travancore.*

3. *Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Huzur Central Records.*

33. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 37, Olas 410 - 415.*



on the Periya Nambi for looking back as he participated in the *Siveli* procession of the Gods. This may appear strange but it serves to stress the weight given to discipline and the strict adherence to norms.<sup>34</sup> Another example of the case is the fine paid by the Periya Nambi during *Ponnum Siveli* because the *Prasadam* was given by mistake to Athiyara Potti, instead of to Muttola Potti, both of whom were members of the *Yogam*.<sup>35</sup> These records also make valuable contributions to deciphering the chronology of the Sovereigns of Travancore, the significance of which cannot be overlooked. And so they go on.

It would be in keeping with the fitness of things to touch upon the two categories of record writers of the Temple. They were the *Karanakkanakkan* and the *Pandarakkanakkan*. The *Karanakkanakkan* was appointed in the time of King Udaya Marthanda Varma in 763 ME/1587 AD and a record exists about the same. He recorded the proceedings and transactions of the *Ettara Yogam*, other significant documents relating to the Temple administration and establishment and he was directly attached to the *Yogam* (council). The *Pandarakkanakkan*'s duty was to write and preserve the records of the day-to-day functioning of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, maintain correct accounts of the Temple treasury and of revenue collections and expenditure and write down all other records connected with the functioning of the Temple. They had assistants but the entire responsibility lay with them. A very serious view was adopted even in the case of the slightest slip-up in the careful recordings. All transactions bore their names as well. The posts were hereditary in character contributing to an enhanced responsibility in the execution of the work.

These priceless manuscripts of the Temple have been dwelt upon at such length to highlight their tremendous significance and authenticity. A representative selection of these records with maximum supporting evidence is being cited in this chapter. They provide impressive insight into that period and mirror the fascinating medieval history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple with considerable clarity.

### Sangramadheera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara

In a glorious history where great rulers abound, Sangramadheera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara stands out by himself as a multifaceted genius. His reign from 474 to 488 ME (1299-1313 AD)<sup>36</sup> was like a lasting sunburst of glory. He was a great Vaishnavite devotee and a protector of the faith. The protection and

34. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2A, Ola 47 (961 ME/1786 AD in Dharma Raja's reign)

35. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2A, Ola 18 (824 ME/1649 AD).

36. 1. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758'.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.

3. Prof. V.S. Sharma – 'Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham'.



preservation of temples were considered the basic functions of the State and community during those periods. Ravi Varma fully subscribed to that view. He was at the same time a mighty warrior, conqueror and an accomplished administrator. His empire extended from the then capital Kollam to Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu and he was coronated thrice as Emperor - once in Kanchi, once in Thiru Adi Desam and once in Madurai on the banks of the River Vaigai. Despite the capital being Kollam, the Sovereign used to regularly repair to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple for worship as it was very close to his heart, demanding constant attention. His reign witnessed a strong religious revival and he was a staunch defender of Hinduism against the Islamic onslaught. One of the special gifts he heaped at the Swamy's feet was a large pure gold vessel called *Koppara* weighing two thousand tolas (a unit of weight). As a committed devotee, he earned the title of *Sree Padmanabhapadakamala Paramaradhakan* (the supreme devotee of the lotus feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy).

Many stone inscriptions bear testimony to this illustrious personage. A Kanchipuram Inscription hails him as "*One who vanquished the Pandians*". A Thiruvananthapuram Inscription lauds him as the "*Master of 64 arts and the Bhoja of the South*." The Poonamalli Madras Inscription also relates to him. The Sreerangam Inscription praises Ravi Varma Kulasekhara as the "*Master and Protector of the three Vedas*."

'Sangramadheera', was so skilled in playing on a vast array of musical instruments that legend has it that when he played them in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the Gods used to assemble there to listen to him. His expertise extended to literature also. He wrote a play in Sanskrit titled *Pradyumnabhyudayam* specifically to be performed in this Temple (Refer chapter *Search of Sources*). This Emperor was the last to come to the throne in the patrilineal line. Matrilineal system of family continuation is considered to have been initiated by him. This is the system followed to this day by the Kshatriya families of Kerala. The King adopted, according to the prescribed norms of the Temple records, two princesses from Puthuppalli Kovilakam of Kola (Kolathu) *Swaroopam* in 480 ME/1305 AD for the continuation of the dynasty. They were designated as the *Mootha Thampuram* (Elder Rani) and *Elaya Thampuram* (Younger Rani) of Attingal, a place 40 km north of Thiruvananthapuram and were the lady members of this dynasty. They had direct connections with and duties to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and their presence was mandatory for important functions. Their family Deity, the Bhagavathi (Goddess) from Madayikkavu was brought and installed at Attingal in the Sree Thiruvattukavu Temple.

The reign of this powerful emperor was a golden era of the medieval age, a rule time itself has been unable to erase.



## Veera Rama Udaya Marthanda Varma

One of the earliest known *Mathilakam* (Temple) Records bears the date 7th *Makaram* 511 ME/January 1336 AD when King Veera Rama Udaya Marthanda Varma was the ruler. In a session with the council in *Mahabharathakonu* (a significant demarcated area) in the Temple, the King resolved to adopt Narayanan Narayanan and Narayanan Krishnan to Puvappalli and permit them to avail themselves of the *Karanama Sambandham* (right of family name). The names of those attending the council, the King included, are listed. The order was addressed to the Swamiyar (the religious head) and placed on an *Amappalaka* (oval plank). The final consent was given by the Council. Thus the democratic process of consultation of public representatives was familiar in the region long before it was formulated by the political machine. This record lists the rates at which the adoptees had to submit gifts to various persons. The King received one hundred and twenty *fanams* (a coin), the Swamiyar fifty four *fanams* and so on.<sup>37</sup>

The Temple Record of 11th *Idavom* 516 ME/June 1341 AD mentions the then Pushpanjali Swamiyar of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by name Amritapalarar. This record too lists as one of the oldest available in the Temple.<sup>38</sup> In the same year, Rama Udaya Marthanda Varma made *Kandaman Illom* responsible for watch and ward of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>39</sup> One unpublished Temple record merits mention. It relates to the service called *Veerapandyan Chilavu* (expenditure made by Veera Pandyan) and instituted in this Temple. Certain lands were set apart to meet the expenses and they were located in the Pandyan territory. This is important as it is clear proof that the influence of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was felt in that powerful kingdom, which was predominantly Saivite in character.<sup>40</sup>

From very long ago it has been observed that the affairs of the Temple were administered by a *Sabha* (council) with the king as the final authority. This has been detailed off and on in the chapter on the ancient history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and as such it does not require further elaboration here. Suffice it to state that it was the forerunner of the *Ettara Yogam*. No authentic *Churuna* has been discovered so far pinpointing the exact date of origin of the *Ettara Yogam* though in *A History of Travancore*, P. Shangoonny Menon states that in 220 ME/1045 AD the *Devaswoms* (assets belonging to the

37. 1. *Mathilakam (Temple) Records*.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – '*History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758*'.

38. Dr. A.G. Menon – '*History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758*'.

39. Sources same as in Note 38. Name of the king not mentioned in this record but got from Dr. V.S. Sharma's book '*Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham*'.

40. K. Maheswaran Nair – *Chronicles of Trivandrum Pagoda*.



Gods, Temple) were re-organised and brought under the management of the *Ettara Yogam*. There is no doubt that it would have become full-fledged and reached the peak of power not long after the period of Sangramadheera Ravi Varma as the subsequent events reveal. This *Sabha* also carried on the matters of Temple administration but variations regarding its structure in those days exist. It is popularly held that, the *Ettara Yogam* consisted of six Potties and the Swamiyar and Karanatta Kurup (both hereditary) with the Swamiyar having full status and the King having half status, which is the constitution prevailing for long now.<sup>41</sup> There exists yet another interesting interpretation of the *Ara* (half) of the *Ettara Yogam*. *Ara* is commonly associated with matters pertaining to royalty. *Aramana*, *Arasan* (king) *Arathali* etc. and the *Ara* or half vote of the King was taken to mean *Rajayogam* or *Ara Yogam*. Whatever that be, the total number of votes cast being *Ettara*, this *Yogam* acquired the name *Ettara Yogam*.

The central point of disquiet in the extremely significant medieval history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was the conflict between the King and the other members of the *Ettara Yogam* for authority and control.<sup>42</sup> From its inception, for a considerable length of time, the ruler's position was supreme and no business was transacted without the previous consent and ultimate sanction of the king, while the *Yogakkar* carried out the routine running of the Temple. A time came when the *Yogakkar* tried to reduce the power and position of the ruler with their increasing religious authority supported by the political power of the eight noble Nair houses — the *Ettu Veetil Pillamar* — who were originally the agents of the Potties. That their combined machinations “*reduced the royal power almost to a vanishing point*” cannot be accepted as no Sovereign, even if he were not strong, was seen to have compromised and remained silent on the matters of this Temple, though the absolute royal authority might have waned at times. The kings by and large tried to check the growing excesses of *Yogakkar* and *Pillamar* and their increasing violation of customs and laws. The royal intervention fanned the flames of resentment and hostility. As such clashes between the king's troops and the men of the *Yogakkar* and *Pillamar* were frequent.

41. The family names of the six hereditary Potti houses or Illoms are as follows.

Kupakkara, Athiyara (Vanchiyoar), Athiyara (Kollur), Neytasseri, Muttavila & Karuva. The secretary Samajitha hailed from Ponkannankuli Illom. The eldest members of the Illoms automatically became the members of the Yogam. It appears that the Ponkannankuli Illom named its eldest male child Anirudhan and that name Anirudhan Anirudhan repeats itself in the chronicles.

42. 1. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon — ‘A Survey of Kerala History’.  
 2. Dr. A.G. Menon — ‘History of the Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.  
 3. Nagam Aiya — The State Manual of Travancore.  
 4. Mathilakam (Temple) Records.  
 5. P. Sangoonny Menon — ‘A History of Travancore’.  
 6. T.K Velu Pillai — Travancore State Manual.



Because of the excess of power enjoyed by the *Yogathil Potties* (Brahmins of the council) which had become an established practice and which very often exceeded royal authority, the Potties repeatedly ignored the king's powers and tried to take full charge of the Temple administration. In the event of any alleged excess of control by the king in Temple matters, the Potties would impose penalty on him. This had become customary down the years.

Like the functionaries of the *Ettara Yogam*, the *Pillamar* also had hereditary connections. Whatever their individual names be, they were known as Ramanamadhathil Pillai, Marthandamadhathil Pillai (who were the two leaders), Kulathoor Pillai, Kazhakkootathu Pillai, Pallichal Pillai, Kutamon Pillai, Chempazhanthi Pillai and Venganoor Pillai. These names have been handed down the years and with passage of time came to be equated with extreme disloyalty of the ominous type. Originally these names were the names of the villages from where these eight chieftains hailed; but later on they became the house names also. These areas continue to exist and can be identified.

The *Ettara Yogam* functioned in an atmosphere that was controversial. Since the Swamiyar's presence was unavoidable, on the rare instances of his absence, the *Yogam* would proceed to where he was and meet there. It is doubtful whether the king would also have journeyed to those places, in which case the authenticity of the rulings of the *Yogam* in his absence would depend on his own personality or power.

The *Yogam* would divide itself into *Varyams* (committees) for efficiency. They operated exercising power in rotation, were three in number and worked during specific periods. Temple records show that only the six Potties acted as members of these sub-committees. Different accounts were maintained. It is important to remember that one separate head was kept for accounting fines and penalties of the royalty, which was the *Garva-kettu* account. This is clear proof of the authority vested in the *Yogam*. At times the kings too acted in a manner inviting censure especially in the might of arms focussed on the Temple tenants and supporters of the Potties. Many a time this was necessitated, as the tenants, taking advantage of the patronage of the Potties, often evaded payment of taxes. One unfortunate practice followed for a course of time by the kings in the medieval period was to hang persons from their own employ to compensate for the death of Brahmins during conflicts. Somewhere during the course of events, the royal staff are seen to have strongly agitated against this system and it was totally abolished thereafter.

### **Veera Kerala Varma or Veera Kerala Varma Thiruvadi**

It is noted that during the reign of Kunnummel Veera Kerala Varma or Veera Kerala Varma Thiruvadi (519-525 ME/1344-1350 AD), possibly following a clash between the Temple servants controlled by the *Yogam* (council) and the



king's men, the king had to pay 3,000 *fanams* (local money) as atonement for the sin of causing death to certain Potti Brahmins.<sup>43</sup> In 520 ME/1344 AD he agreed to make over certain grants of land to the survivors of the *Deshikal* (Brahmin emigrants) for absolution from the sin committed by the murder of these people. He was also fined 30,000 *fanams* which he was to pay to the Temple as *Garva-kettu*, an amercement for overbearing conduct.<sup>44</sup> Actual execution of the above, it is seen, was done only in the time of one of his successors whom the records mention as Bala Marthanda according to the resolution passed by the *Yogam* when he was in urgent need of the *Desi* Brahmins for the celebration of the *Alpashi* festival of 911 ME/1736 AD. As per the date, the said ruler was none other than Veera Bala Marthanda Varma the Great.

Like so many other rulers of Venad, Veera Kerala Varma too was not behind in offering gifts to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. He donated one hundred and fifty seven *paras* (a measure) of paddy field to the Temple. This King, being a personage of unquestioned might and diplomacy, was able to involve himself fully in the daily affairs of the Temple and to establish his authority. This became intolerable to the Potties and to their associates, the Pillais of the Eight Houses, but they were unable to undermine the King's stand or harm him (His influence spread beyond the borders of his State and his inscriptions are seen even in Madurai).

### Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma

The reign of Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma (550-558 ME/1375-1383 AD) was also an era of glory. He was a many-talented personality, with equal mastery of sword and pen. His martial powers were proven off and on and he defeated the Muslim raiders of the south, checking the tide of Islamic advance. He was a staunch Hindu and did much for the temples of his land. The Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, commanded his particular attention as He was a great devotee of that Deity.

Adithya Varma made substantial provision for the conduct of the *Alpashi* festival of 550 ME/1375 AD in the Temple. He also arranged for the correct collection of paddy due to the Temple and for wages to be paid to the Temple servants. His two inscriptions are seen in the Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Temple in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple complex. The first of these bears the chronogram *Cholapriya*, which represents the Saka Year 1296 or 1374/1375 AD through alphabet calculation. The inscription states that the King constructed a *Goshala* (cowshed) and a *Deepagraham* (house of lamps). He

43. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.

44. 1. Mathilakam (Temple) Records.

2. V. Nagam Aiya – The State Manual of Travancore.



also renovated the *Mandapam* (front platform) of this shrine. The second inscription dwells at length on how he acquired the title '*Sarvanganathan*'.<sup>45</sup>

His literary contributions are mentioned separately in the chapter *Search of Sources*.

It is seen at times that two names appear together during the reign of one monarch and also that they acted with authority on Temple matters. This must be because the person who is not the actual ruler would be the next in line on whom directly vests temple matters in general and Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple affairs in particular. In certain instances one of them would have been taken as co-regent. Even in affairs not related to the Temple this is seen. There is the mention of Veera Marthanda Varma III who in 557 ME/1382 AD, i.e. during the rulership of Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma, offered four silver pots and five thousand *fanams* to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple for having been the cause of death of many men during the war in Manur (Kilimanoor) possibly led by him.<sup>46</sup> Veera Marthanda Varma would have been the *Elayaraja* (junior prince) and heir.

The Temple chronicles mention in some detail the war at Karuvelamkulam in 592 ME/1416 AD.<sup>47</sup> Ravi Varma, who was the Junior *Thiruvadi* or *Thrippappoor Mooppan* (Elayaraja), dedicated to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple one elephant and six silver pots as well as five thousand *fanams* in atonement for having inflicted loss of life on invading armies from Tamil Nadu or on the Temple servants who fought in defence against them at Karuvelamkulam in Thirunelveli District. The war might have been against the Pandyan King, Jatavarman Parakrama Pandyan. There is another view that the victory was over the invading forces of the *Zamindar* of Rettiyapuram. The *Karuvelamkulam Puja* long performed in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple commemorates the victory of this Prince, Ravi Varma. It is also an additional proof to show that all the positive and negative currents which encircled the Throne found automatic and natural reflection as related matters in the Temple. If some misfortune befell, redress was sought by offerings and acts of penance in the Temple, in the event of joyous happenings, gratitude and happiness were

45. 1. S.P. Iyer – *Mathilakam (Temple) Records VII, Olas 1 & 2 & Churuna 1720 Ola 113*.  
 2. Prof. A.G. Menon – '*History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758*'.  
 3. "*Unnuneeli Sandesom*".  
 4. *Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. V pp. 124/125/133/134*.  
 5. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – '*A Survey of Kerala History*'.
46. 1. *Mathilakam (Temple Records)*.  
 2. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.
47. 1. *Mathilakam Temple Records/Temple Chronicles*.  
 2. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore (Vol. 1)*.  
 3. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – '*A Survey of Kerala History*'.



translated as offerings and special rituals were made to the Temple by the royalty.

### King Veera Iravi Iravi Varma

A service of utmost significance was rendered to the Temple by King Veera Iravi Iravi Varma which proved to be a milestone in preserving and protecting the chain of events which formed the history of this ancient Temple. In 600 ME/ 1425 AD, this King ordered that all records of the Temple be compiled and that a store room be got ready to house them, in the Temple premises.<sup>48</sup>

Another very important act of this King was the appointment of Tarananallloor Namboodiripad as the Tantri of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The Tarananallloor Namboodiripads hail from Irinjalakkuta and rank among the foremost in Vaishnava worshippers among the Tantries of this land.<sup>49</sup>

### Bharani Thirunal Veera Marthanda Varma

Bharani Thirunal Veera Marthanda Varma, also known as Udaya Marthanda Varma Kulasekhara Perumal, finds a prominent place in the chronicles of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. He was of a deeply religious and charitable disposition and made bountiful offerings to many temples and gifts to varied charities in different parts of his extensive territory.<sup>50</sup> Inscriptions and chronicles bear testimony to the greatness of this ruler. Udaya Marthanda Varma is seen to have resided at Kalakkat (in present-day Tamil Nadu) quite often to give protection to his lands on the eastern side of the Ghats. Charities established by this ruler known even today as the 'Kalakkat Raja's Charities of Agastheeswaram' have traversed the centuries and continue to exist. Sixteen documents make mention of him in the Temple manuals. The name Rama Marthanda Varma also features in some records of that time. He could have been the Thrippappoor Mooppan who later became the King.

Copper and bronze coins carrying the reclining figure of Maha Vishnu on Ananta have been discovered. The figure with the head inclined to the right is believed to be Thiruvattar Sree Adi Kesava Perumal and the image with the head directed to the left is Thiruvananthapuram Sree Padmanabha Perumal. Difference in opinion exists regarding their origin. While some claim them to be *Thrippati Danam* commemoration coins minted in 1750 AD others like Prof. M.G. Sasibhooshan with expertise in the field project the view that they

48. 1. *Mathilakam (Temple Records)*.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of the Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

49. *The place of a Tantri in any Temple is automatically hereditary.*

50. 1. *Mathilakam Records, Churuna 177, Ola 157.*

2. *Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Sree Chitrodaya Huzur Central Records Series Granthavali.*



are of much earlier stock, perhaps around the 15th or 16th century when Venad rule found concentration in places like Valliyoor, Cheramahadevi, Kalakkat, etc. He cites the conspicuous absence of the *Siva Lingam* on the side depicting Sree Padmanabha Swamy in support of his stand. If this holds good, then these coins could possibly have been there during this prominent ruler's period.

The Temple *Granthavari* registers the historically significant assumption of the title *Cheraman Perumal* by him emphasising his ancient lineage and direct descent from the great Cheras. Thenceforth he wore the crown of the Cheras famed as the *Cheramudi* studded with *Navaretnas* (nine kinds of gems).<sup>51</sup>

On assuming the supreme position in the State, King Rama Marthanda Varma turned his immediate attention to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, which had all long exerted its sway over him. In 634 ME/1459 AD and 636 ME/1461 AD he promulgated two commands concerning the Temple arrangements. The renovation of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple figured foremost in the list of priorities. The work commenced in the year 634 ME/1459 AD and was brought to a highly successful conclusion in 636 ME/1461 AD.<sup>52</sup> An important feature was the installation of an *Ottakkal Mandapam* (platform made of one stone) in front of the inner shrine, which is a unique feature of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>53</sup> The main Idol was shifted to the *Balalayam* following the resolve to reconstruct the *Vimanam* (roof) of the sanctum. The *Madappally* (Temple kitchen), *Chuttu Mandapam*, *Abhisravana Mandapam*, *Vilakku Madom* (wooden frames running around the entire exterior area of the inner Temple portion with holders for lighting of lamps) etc. were renovated. (The term 'renovation' is of great importance as it proves the existence of all these structures for a fairly long time back to require renovation). After completion of the entire work, in the month of *Makaram* 636 ME or January/February 1461 AD, the Idol was re-installed in the sanctum. Religious rituals like *Nalam Kalasam* (4th day rites), *Kumbhabhishekam*, *Sreebeli* etc. were conducted by the Tantri, Tarananalloor Namboodiripad, as per ritualistic tradition.<sup>54</sup>

Like many other kings who ruled this land, this King too hailed from the Keezhperur royal house into which a line of the Cheras merged. His branch or *Thavazhi* was Desinganadu (Quilon) as is seen from his record in connection with the Temple renovation. It is reproduced here for historical and general interest.

51. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Mathilakam Records*, Churuna 1719, Ola 38.

52. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. V. Nagam Aiya, – *State Manual of Travancore*.

53. Refer chapters on 'The Inner Radiance' and 'The Abode of the Divine'.

54. 1. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer 636 ME/1461 AD – Churuna 2602, Ola 3 – (Central Record Series *Granthavali* No. 2, Document 8.

2. *Mathilakam Records* (Handwritten).



“കീഴപ്പേരൂർ ചേതങ്ങാട് (കൊല്ലം) ഇല്ലത്തിൽ ചങ്കരനാരായണൻ ചിരി (ചേര) വീര ഇരമ മാർത്താണ്ഡ വർമ്മൻ പണിചെയ്തത്.”

This is an exception as normally the members of the *Desinganad Swaroopam*, though itself a sovereign branch of the royal dynasty, had no rulership or Sovereign rights to the Throne of Venad.

Rama Marthanda Varma became accepted by all as the ruler of Venad by 645 ME/1469 AD.<sup>55</sup> Another important event was the assumption of the historic title of *Kulasekhara Perumal* by him in 640 ME/1465 AD.<sup>56</sup> This title did not fall on the rulers automatically but could be obtained subject to certain prerequisites.

A new *Madhom* known as the Sankaranarayana Marthanda Madhom attached to the Temple was put up under command of the ruler in 644 ME/1469 AD.<sup>57</sup> The same year records a royal gift of 13,000 *fanams* to cover the cost of making a gold elephant for the Temple, as well as three hundred and sixty *fanams* for five silver pots submitted to the Lord by the King in order to expiate the wrong committed against Jayasimhanad (his own family line) by the King.<sup>58</sup>

King Rama Marthanda Varma constructed a granite well inside the Temple.<sup>59</sup> It merits special mention as the shape was altered to a square from the traditional circular shape.

This monarch's reign was undoubtedly a landmark in the socio-religious history of Venad with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple dominating it at many stages.

## Veera Kotha Marthanda Varma

He is seen to have been in power next during the years 647-656 ME/1472-1481 AD and continued the keen interest of his ancestors in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Appointment was given by him to one Namboodiri Brahmin to read the *Mahabharatham* epic in the Temple. It is gratifying that even centuries later this practice continues. The reading is daily done on the ancient *Mandapam* outside the Sree Krishna shrine.

Following the destruction of the Northern *Gopuram* (entrance) of the Temple, it was decided by the King to reconstruct it in the year 656 ME/1481 AD. The pillar was immediately erected for the execution of the same.<sup>60</sup>

55. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1667, Ola 322.*

56. *Mathilakam Records.*

57. *Mathilakam Records.*

58. *V. Nagam Aiya – Mathilakam Records 7, The State Manual of Travancore.*

59. *Mathilakam Records, Churuna 1270, Olas 160–161. 645 ME/1470 AD.*

60. *Details of King Veera Kotha Marthanda Varma obtained from handwritten Temple Manuals – Churuna 2A, Ola 24.*



## Bharani Thirunal Jayasimha Deva II of Venad

This King who came next is remembered for his humane social reforms which were far beyond the times he lived. The privileges and protection extended to the lower castes assured by him in 661 ME/1486 AD can perhaps be, in a way, compared only to the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1111 ME/1936 AD by Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma, in its social import. This aspect has already been dealt with in the introduction to Medieval History in this chapter. The name Veera Kerala Varma also appears.

## Veera Iravi Iravi Varma

His successor was Veera Iravi Iravi Varma. A *Churuna* dated *Chingom* 662 ME / 1486 AD, (August/September) surfaces regarding a communication to the *Ettara Yogam* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple from the *Sabha* of Karuvelankulam regarding certain rents. The text of this document reveals an interesting fact that certain lands at Kalakkat (now in Thirunelveli District) had been given away to this Temple by King Parakrama Pandya Deva of Madurai by way of a fine.<sup>61</sup> This is an example to show the influence exerted by this Temple on the powerful and, more often than not, unfriendly Pandyan rulers.

Since many of the records have yet to be unravelled there is a possibility that parts of the historical evolution of this sacred Institution might be missed out. Every effort is being put in to keep up the continuity and flow of the tide of time of this timeless Abode of God.

## Iravi Adithya Varma

Iravi Adithya Varma features next in the available chronology but it is specifically stated that he was the junior prince of Venad and not the actual ruler. It is seen that on many occasions the junior princes were vested with administrative and executive powers in Temple affairs. The chronicle of 662 ME/1486 AD records certain old transactions with regard to the affairs<sup>62</sup> of the lands of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. (Mention of the *Attingal Swaroopam* appears off and on because the reigning royalty hailed from it by birth.)

## Pooruruttathi Thirunal Iravi Iravi Varma, Senior Thiruvadi of Thrippappoor Keezhperur

King Iravi Iravi Varma who ascended the throne next left his hallmark in the annals of the Temple's history. He was also a great devotee and much involved even in the minutest details relating to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy

61. *The Pandyan threat and occasional dominance during certain periods were finally dealt with by Sangramadheera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara.*

62. 1. *Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Sree Chitrodaya Huzur Central Records Series No. 3.*  
2. *Mathilakam Records, Churuna 1686, Ola 94.*



Temple. The tussle for supreme authority of the Temple between the ruler and the *Ettara Yogam* was a deep rooted factor of discord and depending on whether the king was strong or weak, the *Ettara Yogam* would exert its considerable power. Iravi Iravi Varma was not only powerful but also a sound ruler. The notable aspect is that many of his reforms were before he became the actual ruler, in his capacity as the Thrippappoor Mooppan, the second in line. He was successful in checking the control and excesses of the *Yogam* and its partisans without reaching an open confrontation though the relations were strained.

The *Mathilakam* manuals speak at length of the grand scale renovation of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by this monarch, with the full support of the *Ettara Yogam* as well as the public. Prompted by fear of fire which had occurred previously in this Temple, he obtained sanction for the utilisation of granite to replace the traditional wood of Kerala temple architecture. He was able to reconstruct the *Vathil Madom*, *Chuttambalam* and *Madappally* and pave the floor with granite. An achievement in this context was the magnificently finished roof of the second floor of the sanctum with the gold *Thazhikkutams* (globe-like structures) placed atop. It is said that it was so superb that it even won the praise of the celestials.

Lighting of lamps has always been an important function in temples. The King had ordered the lighting of lamps all around this Temple as an act of devotion and gratitude in 665 ME/1490 AD.<sup>63</sup> A year later, in 666 ME/1491 AD Iravi Iravi Varma took an important step by making certain arrangements to ensure that the *Pujas* and *Sreebeli* (special ritual) be performed without break.<sup>64</sup> The finances of the Temple were more often than not mismanaged by the members of the *Yogam* and their assistants, the 'Pillais of the Eight Houses', and it was not difficult to manipulate them at will especially if the ruler was weak or engaged in warfare.

Iravi Iravi Varma introduced an administratively important reform with the appointment of an accountant known as *Melkanganom*.<sup>65</sup>

If the chronicles of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are perused, it is seen that it abounds in repeated instances of the members of the royalty, especially the king paying fines and doing acts of atonement for wrongs committed directly or vicariously by them and in many cases, on behalf of the priests too. Their anxiety to compensate in some way the injured parties is often reflected in their subsequent actions. In like manner this King too had his share of penalties to pay.

63. 665 ME/1490 AD *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 1673, Ola 5.

64. *Mathilakam Records*.

65. *Mathilakam Manual* – In month of Kanni 673 ME/1497 AD. Churuna 1686, Ola 38.



He is seen to have gifted twelve silver pots and some granite images as atonement of the sin committed in a fight at the northern entrance of the Temple. Gifts of lands were bestowed on the injured parties as well. The year was 674 ME/1499 AD.<sup>66</sup> Again, the next year sees a repetition of such acts of penance when the King paid five thousand *fanams* as *Garva-kettu* (atonement for ego) and submitted a silver vessel to the Lord to get absolved of the sin of having caused destruction to some villages at that time.<sup>67</sup> In the same year he is seen to have again remitted a fine for the fault of his staff who destroyed Temple estates in Chirayinkeezhu.<sup>68</sup>

A religiously significant practice was introduced by the King in 674 ME/1499 AD with the daily rendering of the *Puranas*, *Ramayanam* and *Mahabharatham*, which continues even now.<sup>69</sup> Different types of *Sevas* (services) to the Deity demanded his attention. In 676 ME/1501 AD, while in residence at the Sreepadam Palace in Thiruvananthapuram, he ordered the manufacture and use of fourteen specific musical instruments in the worship of God.<sup>70</sup> This also illustrates his indepth knowledge in the area of temple music (which was a necessary appendage to ritualistic worship). He also ruled that the *Sankhu*, sacred in Vaishnava<sup>71</sup> worship, be blown and the *Kombu* (a piped instrument) be played in connection with the first early morning *Puja* termed *Nirmalya Puja*.

A shrewd judge of situations, Iravi Iravi Varma took the precaution of prohibiting weapons inside the Temple. He issued a *Neettu* (royal directive) to the Swamiyar in 676 ME/1501 AD informing him that commands had been issued forbidding all persons to carry any type of weapon within the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>72</sup> They were also barred entry wearing stitched clothing, caps etc. Other general directions regarding the precincts were also

66. 1. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1722, Ola 6.*

2. *V. Nagam Aiya – The State Manual of Travancore.*

67. *T.K Velu Pillai – Mathilakam Records.*

68. *Mathilakam Records – 675 ME/1500 AD.*

69. *Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Huzur Central Records Series, Vol. III - Important Mathilakam Records*

70. 1. *Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Huzur Central Records Series, Vol. III - Churuna 1720, Ola 127.*

(1) ചെറിയ ഓച്ചു പങ്ക് (2) വാർപ്പു മത്തളം-1 (3) ആറക ഉലുവ-4 (4) മാത്തു ഓച്ചു ഇടക്ക-1 (5) പിടകം-1 (6) കൂഴൽ-1 (7) ചില്ലിത്താളം-1 (8) തിരുവമ്പാടി പങ്ക്-1 (9) കണ്ണൻ കോടൽ പങ്ക്-1 (10) വടക്കൻ മാരായൻ ഉടുക്ക-1 (11) പിറക്കടെ മാരായൻ ഇടക്ക-1 (12) കുളത്തൂർ പങ്ക്-1 (13) ഇടക്ക-2 (14) കൊമ്പ്-1

2. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1673 Ola 5.*

71. *Vaishnava – of Lord Vishnu.*

72. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1686, Ola 70, Churuna 24 Ola 131.*



included. A *Churuna* relating to the years under survey deals with the details of ornaments of Sree Padmanabha Swamy's *Sreebelibimbam*, revealing its existence at that time as well.<sup>73</sup>

A ritual which continues to be observed finds mention in the contemporary records of this ruler and that is the submission of the holy bow on *Thiru Onam* day (said to be the Thirunal of Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram) in the year 677 ME/1502 AD. The name of the carpenter, Puthangadi Kannalen Mathevan Kumaran Ashari, who fashioned the bow in wood is also mentioned. (More details of this ritual are provided in the chapter *Worship of the Celestial*).<sup>74</sup>

Iravi Iravi Varma was certainly progressive in outlook. In those days (and very much later too), sea voyage was prohibited to Kshatriyas but this ruler journeyed by sea from Kantukontanturai to South Travancore following some difficulty in surface transport.<sup>75</sup> It is significant to remember that he did this despite stigmas and possible serious censure when he was the Thrippappoor Mooppan who was responsible for the Temple.

The year 680 ME/ 1505 AD saw a number of important events in the Temple. The King, not satisfied with the appointment of an accountant, turned his attention to the decoration of the Deities and to a listing of the ornaments.<sup>76</sup> The Tantries of the *Tarananalloor Mana* (house) had been having long-standing connections with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Iravi Iravi Varma reconfirmed the appointment of this family as Tantri or supreme religious authority of this Temple by appointing Netumpalli Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Padmanabhan to this position subsequent to the demise of Netumpalli Padmanabhan Kesavan.<sup>77</sup> In this year a solid record house was built on the Temple premises to store the piles of manuscripts of the Temple.<sup>78</sup>

Iravi Iravi Varma had to fight several small battles during the years 673-682 ME/1498-1507 AD. He must have succeeded in establishing peace by 682 ME. He had the *Kalasam* ceremony performed in the Sree Padmanabha

73. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records – Document No. 58, Churuna 1283, Olas 194 - 196.*

74. 1. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer. *Churuna 1722, Ola 10 & Churuna 24, Ola 55 - Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III.*

2. Dr. V.S. Sharma – '*Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham*'.

75. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1719, Ola 10.*

76. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2601, Ola 132.*

77. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2602, Ola 192.*

78. 1. *Mathilakam Records.*

2. Dr. A. G. Menon – '*History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758*'.



Swamy Temple that year itself.<sup>79</sup> To atone for the slaying of people during warfare, the King made an offering of twenty seven silver vessels along with grants of land to the Temple.

Concern for and devotion to the Temple never abated in the heart of this illustrious ruler. They were recurrently mirrored in so many of his actions down through the years. It is seen that the year 685 ME/1509 AD saw the Temple facing a grave financial situation. The King had no hesitation in donating lands to it to defray the expenses for *Nityanadi* (daily worship), and other *Pujas*.<sup>80</sup>

It is indeed in keeping with the fitness of things that the last record available of King Iravi Iravi Varma should deal with the lighting of lamps in front of the Deity and around, as a spillover of the devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy that welled up within him, leaving behind an aura of its own.<sup>81</sup>

## Veera Adithya Varma

Yet another example of apparent overlapping of authority is seen with regard to Veera Adithya Varma, who was obviously in a place of control and command in the management of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple during the reign of Veera Iravi Iravi Varma. This can be explained with ease as this prince was only next to the King and in his position as Thrippappoor Mooppan, Temple affairs were his direct portfolio. As such in 679 ME/1504 AD Adithya Varma donated one lakh twenty four thousand and six hundred and forty eight *fanams* for the purchase of gold for making the idol of the Bhoomi Devi.<sup>82</sup> It is obvious that he too was not behind in submission of offerings to the Temple but this particular act of his was religiously significant due to the place occupied by Bhoomi Devi in this Temple, in the sanctum itself.

There is some confusion in the matter of the next few royal personages because of conflict of dates and names in the available sources of history. To clarify the position, because of existing contradictions, I have followed the records and hand-written manuals of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple alone whenever differences and doubts surfaced, as there can be no more authentic material available than these.

## Bhoothala Veera Rama Varma

Three scrolls relating to the Warrior King Bhoothala Veera Rama Varma who reigned over Venad in the 14th century are exceedingly important and

79. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1727, Ola 107.*

80. 1. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1710 and 1720, Ola 24.*

2. *T.K. Velu Pillai – Temple Records.*

81. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1673, Ola 5.*

82. 1. *Mathilakam Manual – Churuna 67, Ola I (13.6.679 ME 1504 AD).*

2. *Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Important Mathilakam Records.*



revealing. Bearing the years.... 695, 696 and 722 corresponding to 1520, 1521 and 1546 AD., the King's name is preceded by the distinctive title 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa'.<sup>83</sup> This is conclusive evidence of the existence and utilisation of this precious title of glory long before it became well known with the *Thrippati Danam* centuries later. They tell of the scroll executed in favour of an individual by name Vaatappaati Kandan for conduct of *Puja* in the name of the King in this Temple of the Perumal, of the loan of paddy from the same person by the king on behalf of the Deity Sree Padmanabha Perumal and of the *Pattayola* (lease deed) executed by 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' on behalf of 'Sree Padmanabha Perumal', respectively.<sup>84</sup>

## Veera Iravi Varma

The next important manuscript is of 701 ME/1526 AD relating to Veera Iravi Varma who had been cited earlier as the junior prince. He would have been none other than the Thrippappoor Mooppan of that time. He paid particular attention to recording the details of the temple ornaments.<sup>85</sup> A later entry in the month of *Meenom* 707 ME/1532 AD states that he had the well inside the Temple cleaned up for the *Painkuni* festival of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>86</sup> This is very important as it corrects the common belief that this festival was an innovation of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma the Great in the Seventeen Hundreds.

## Kothala Veera Marthanda Varma alias (Rama) Udaya Marthanda Varma

Though the *Mathilakam* Records obtained thus far mention Kothala Veera Marthanda Varma alias (Rama) Udaya Marthanda Varma I in its chronicles dated 1.1.721, 30.1.721, and 31.1.721 ME/ 1545 AD, he was the junior Thiruvadi in that year and Adithya Marthanda Varma the senior Thiruvadi (king). That Kothala Veera Marthanda Varma was the Thrippappoor Mooppan is clearly mentioned in the Temple Records.

(Rama) Udaya Marthanda Varma (Kothala Veera Marthanda Varma) was a great warrior and able administrator but his leaning was more to the might of the sword. He waged wars against the Vijayanagaram Empire and the Pandyan King and had a formidable army, which included women archers, at his

83. R. Vasudeva Poduval – *Travancore Inscriptions - A Topographical list.*

84. (From Cadjan records) – Trivandrum Palace Library Agakkettu Kanakku (now in the State Archives quoted from R. Vasudeva Poduval – *Travancore Inscription – A Topographical List.* (P. 340-341).

85. 1. T.K. Velu Pillai – *Churuna 1719 Ola 91 – Mathilakam Records.*

2. S. Parameswara Iyer – *Huzur Central Records Series No.III–Churuna 1719, Ola 112.*

86. *Mathilakam Granthavari.*



command.<sup>87</sup> After the Pandyan War in which he is said not to have succeeded, he accompanied the Pandyan King for worship at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This also illustrates the code of chivalry of war in bygone days and the degree of respect accorded to this prince by the victor.

He gave generously to temples, charities, festivals and erected religious and secular buildings in many parts of the State. His inscriptions are scattered in various areas of south Tamil Nadu and in territories where Venad held sway.

A number of steps taken by Kothala Veera Marthanda Varma regarding the Temple are seen compressed within a month in the year 721 ME/1545 AD, perhaps prompted by the urgency of impending war. Settlement was reached on the appointment of a particular person to the post of Panchagavyathu Nambi after due verification of records to ascertain the correctness of the same. This Nambi was given the ceremonial umbrella of office by the *Ettara Yogam*<sup>88</sup> on the same day *Keruva Madhom* was adopted by the *Ettara Yogam*.<sup>89</sup> The next day saw the adoption of *Kureva Illom*.<sup>90</sup> There was no question of delayed action when it came to grave instances of misconduct against the Temple. When Oppottu Nambi stole something valuable from the Lord's treasury, he was exiled by this prince from the State following precedents.<sup>91</sup>

Udaya Marthanda Varma is seen to have issued a royal command appointing an accountant to be in charge of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple lands and for the conduct of *Veera Marthandan* and *Karuvelamkulam Puja*.<sup>92</sup> All this gives a fair idea of the powers and status enjoyed by the Elayaraja or Thrippappoor Mooppa.

Since Udaya Marthanda Varma was fully engaged in waging war with Vijayanagaram, the condition of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, especially its finances, rapidly deteriorated and hit the rock bottom. It is doubtful if ever before they had touched such an alarming deficit. It is recorded that two brass vessels of the Temple had to be pledged under the orders of the ruler, by the Panchagavyathu Nambi Kesavan Sivan Poovappalli, to procure rice for the daily *Pujas* in the Temple, there being no other means of meeting the expense

---

87. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Huzur Central Records Series No. III - Important Mathilakam Records*.

*The sources or the records of 721 ME/1545AD relating to Kothalaveera Marthanda Varma are all from the Mathilakam Records and some from 'Chronicles of the Trivandrum Pagoda' by Dr. K. Maheswaran Nair.*

88. 30-1-721 ME/1545 AD – *Mathilakam Records*.

89. Churuna 2602, Ola 243 – *Mathilakam Records*.

90. 31-1-721 ME/1545 AD.

91. Churuna 2A, Ola 27 – 721 ME/1545AD.

92. Churuna 1680, Ola 65 – 1.1.721 ME/1545 AD.



thereof.<sup>93</sup> After the month of *Dhanu* (December/January) that year, for two months *Pujas* remained totally suspended. It was indeed a black period for the Temple and consequently for the throne. The reigning sovereign Adithya Marthanda Varma had to intervene in the absence of the concerned prince (Kothalaveera Marthanda Varma) and direct one of the junior princes, Veera Iravi Varma, to put matters right in the year 727 ME/1552 AD.<sup>94</sup>

Though this royal personage does not seem to have become king even at a later date (as that very same year of 729 ME/1554 AD records accession of another king to the throne), his services to the Temple accomplished in minimum time, cannot be ignored.<sup>95</sup> He was well-versed and efficient in administration and took steps to tone up the lax temple management. He insisted on punctuality.

It may not be out of place here to remark that in the tempestuous medieval history of this famed Temple, along with conflicts and clashes between the kings and their troops on one side and the other members of the *Ettara Yogam* — the Potties and their henchmen, the Pillais and servants on the other side, financial crises loomed large off and on. It is distressing to reflect that in such situations pawning of Temple articles and the personal articles of the royalty had to be resorted to in order to honour commitments, which were held in high priority. (In this context, it is interesting to reproduce a record here, though it is not relevant to the Temple as such, but taken from the Temple manuals. It states that a personal gold ornament belonging to the king was pledged to defray the expenses of the marriage commitment of an individual who was his dependent).

Temple records detail the assumption of the title of 'Chiravayi Mooppan' by Adithya Varma on Friday 12th *Painguni* - *Meenom* (March/April) 729 ME/1554 AD. *Rohini Nakshathram* (star) day, 6th day of the first fortnight, *Idavom Rasi* at Sree Mahadevar Temple in Thiruvithamcode.<sup>96</sup> These details in full are reproduced here to bring home two points. The coronation was not done in a Vishnu Temple in Thiruvananthapuram but in a Siva Temple elsewhere. This is supportive proof that cult clashes had found no place in the domain of the

93. 1. T.K. Velu Pillai – *Mathilakam Records*.

2. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III - Important Mathilakam Records*.

*All records dealing with Adithya Marthanda Varma & Prince II Veera Iravi Varma taken from above records. Churunas 1727 and 24, Olas 126 & 29 respectively).*

94. *Churuna 1727, Ola 157 – Mathilakam Records*.

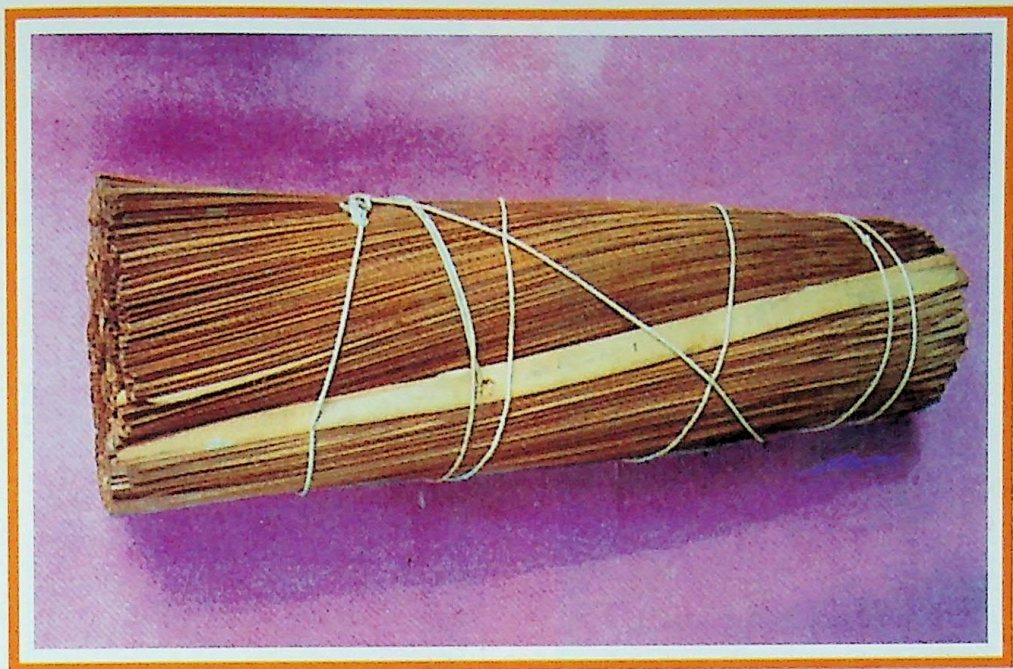
95. 1. T.K. Velu Pillai – *Churuna 1719, Ola 91 - Mathilakam Records*

2. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records (Huzur Records Series Vol. III)*.

96. 1. *Mathilakam Records – Ola dated 12th in the month of Meenam 729 ME/1554 AD.*

2. *M. Raja Raja Varma Raja – Some Travancore Dynastic Records - AD 1544-1677.*

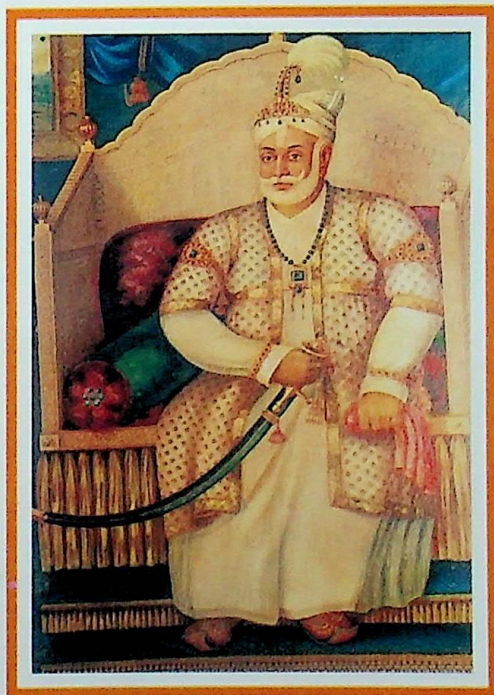




A bundle of the famed Churunas (Temple Records)



Anizham Thirunal Maharaja Veera Bala  
Marthanda Varma the Great



Karthika Thirunal Maharaja Rama Varma  
(Dharma Raja)

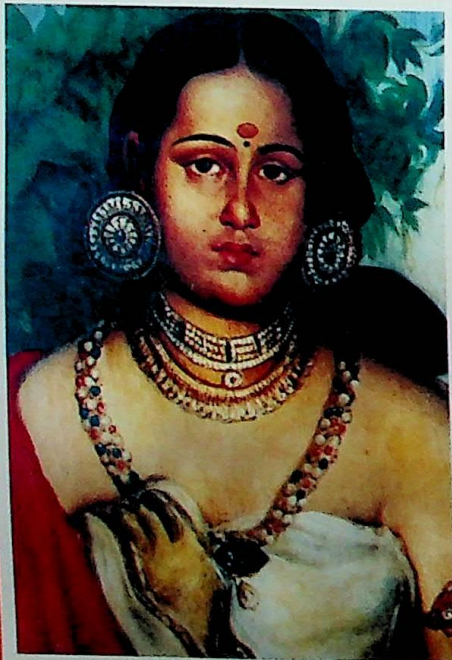




Avittom Thirunal  
Maharaja Bala Rama Varma



Aayilyam Thirunal  
Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi



Uthrittathi Thirunal  
Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi



Swathi Thirunal  
Maharaja Rama Varma





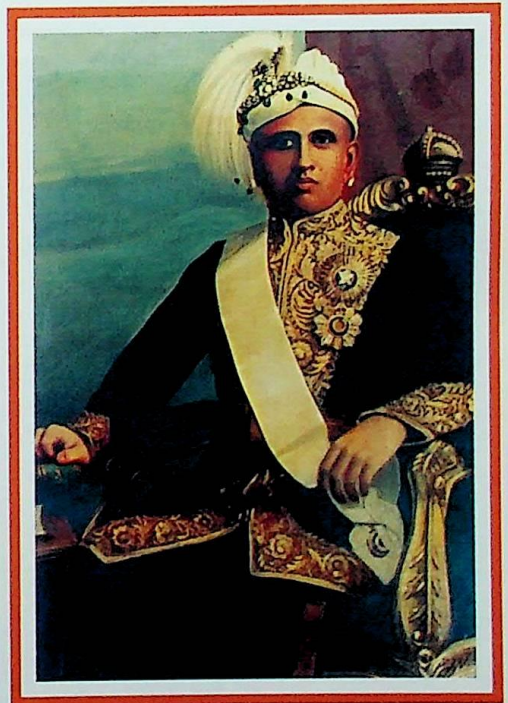
Uthrom Thirunal  
Maharaja Marthanda Varma



Aayilyam Thirunal  
Maharaja Rama Varma



Vishaghom Thirunal  
Maharaja Rama Varma



Moolom Thirunal  
Maharaja Rama Varma

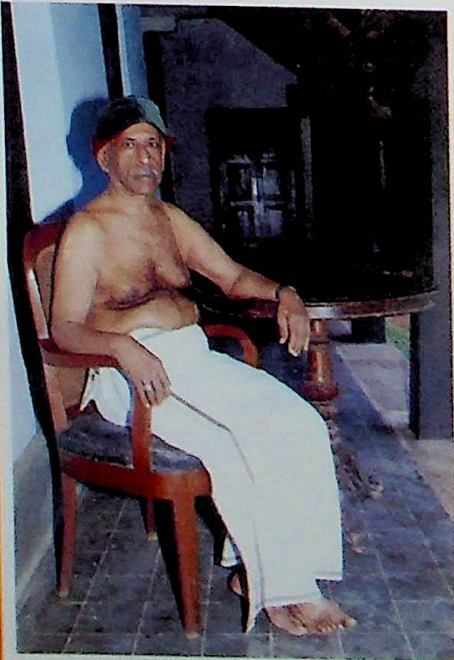




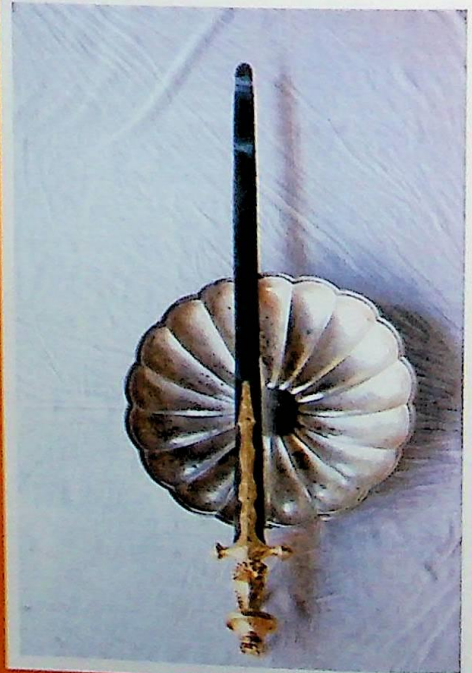
Pooradam Thirunal  
Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi



Chithira Thirunal  
Maharaja Bala Rama Varma

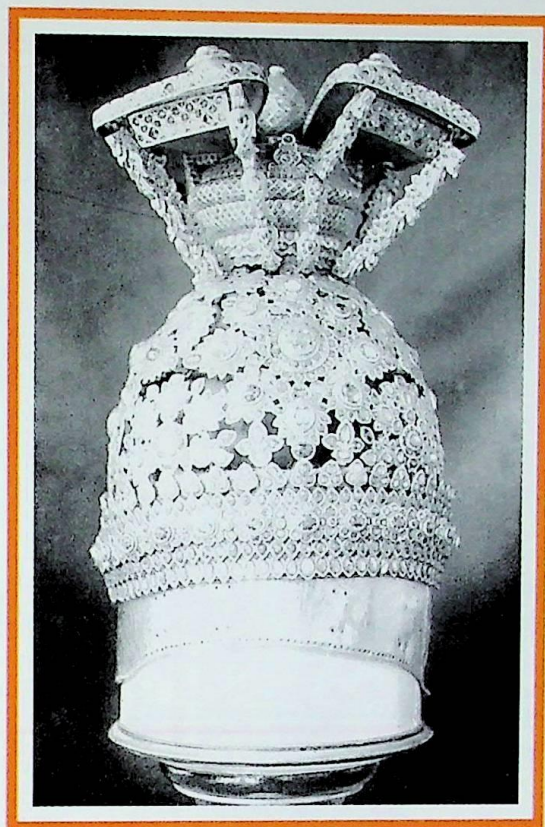


Uthradom Thirunal  
Maharaja Marthanda Varma

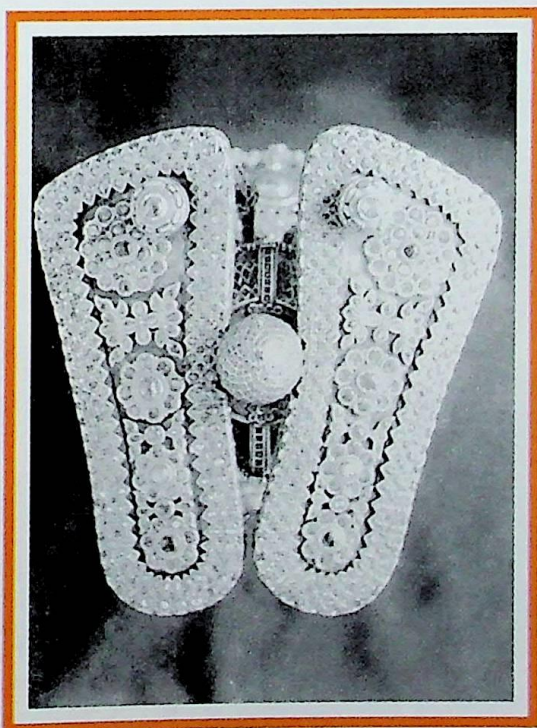


Historic Sword of  
(Thrippati Danam) Marthanda Varma



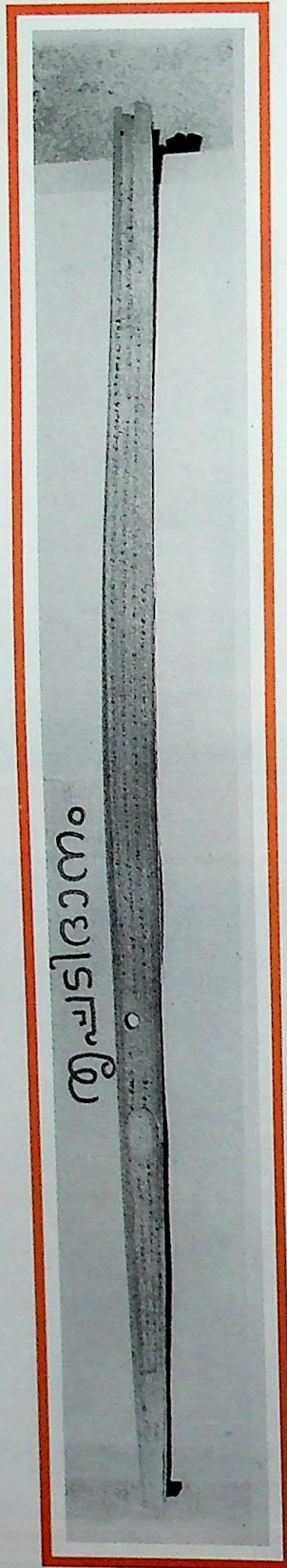


Crown of the Kulasekharas



Sree Padmanabha Padam on the Crown



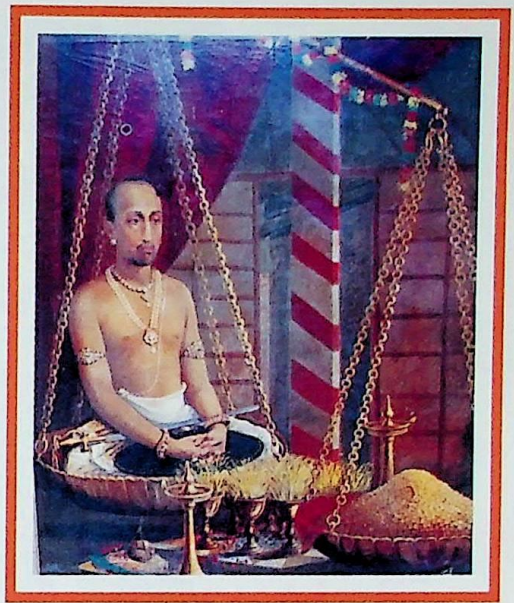


Thrippathi Danam Record (Ola)

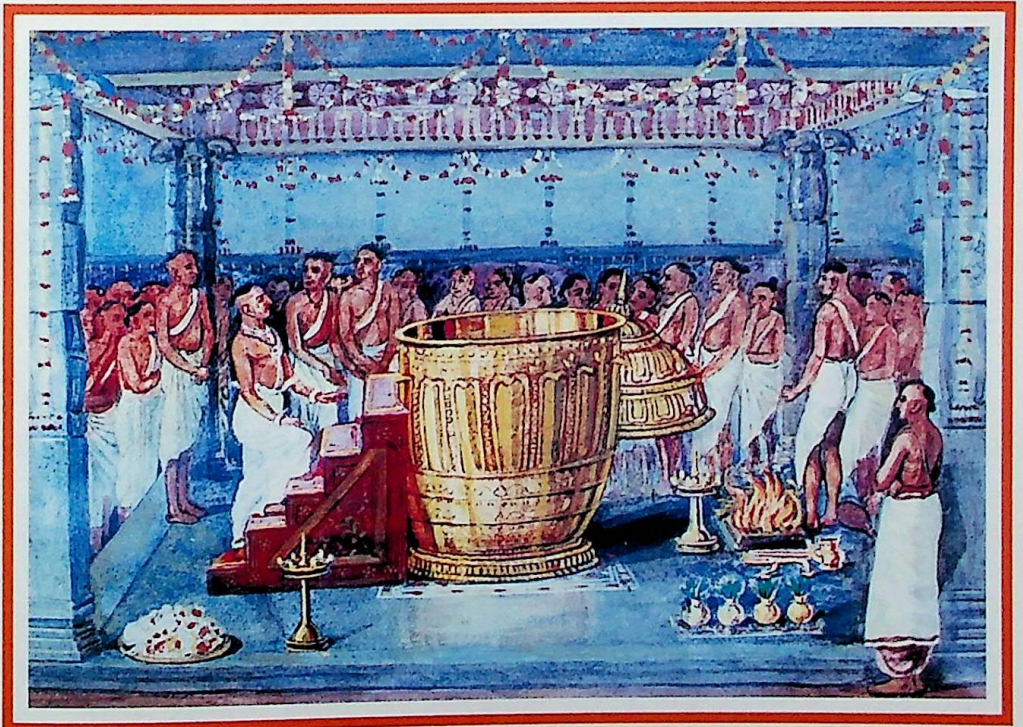




Drawing the Ona Villu



Thulapurusha Dana  
Vishaghom Thirunal  
Maharaja Rama Varma



Hiranyagarbham - Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma





Master Mason  
Ananta Padmanabhan Asari  
Sketch by R. Viswanathan Asari  
Artist, State Archaeology Department



Divines as visualised and accepted by the royal children of Venad. Adithya Varma's rule too left behind its stamp on the annals of the Temple and the temporal history of the land. He seems to have been the first King to add the prefix *Vanchi* (which is synonymous with this land itself) to his name. He then came to be known as *Vanchi Adithya Varma*. This King was successful in accomplishing what his ancestors had longed for, the defeat of Vijayanagaram, which he brought about following an invasion from that Empire.

While the dynasties of Cochin and Kozhicode had the common dynastic names of *Perumpadappu* and *Nediyiruppu Swaroopams* respectively, their branches had only the status of being branch families of a common *Swaroopam* as they did not enjoy independent royal status as a separate *Swaroopam*.<sup>97</sup> The case of the Thrippappoor Swaroopam was different and unique. All the five branches had the distinction of *Swaroopam* attached to their dynastic names, denoting sovereign status of their own and inter-adoption were common even when enough members were present in the royal houses were common keeping the regal status on a par. This was the custom followed till the time of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, the Maker of Modern Travancore. As such overlapping of names and coeval presence of a king and a co-regent exercising rights of rulership were the accepted systems.

### Veera Kerala Varma or Unni Kerala Varma

We perceive the similar state of affairs during the reign of Adithya Varma. From the year 734 ME/1559 AD the records frequently make mention of Veera Kerala Varma or Unni Kerala Varma of Desinganad Swaroopam (one of the five branches of the said dynasty). His place in the scheme of affairs seems to be that of a co-ruler even though he could not certainly be the Chiravayi Mooppan. That office was occupied by Adithya Varma himself. In 734 ME/1559 AD his name appears on the decrees of adoption of *Koopakkara Madhom*<sup>98</sup> and later on of *Neythasseri Illom*.<sup>99</sup> This name is seen again on the orders issued to the *Ettara Yogam* for consideration of Temple matters.<sup>100</sup>

A fragmented record of 735 ME/1558 AD is of import. It relates to the theft of silver from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by Temple servants.<sup>101</sup>

97. Dr. R.P. Raja – Mavelikkara Utsavamadhom Palace.

98. 1. Mathilakam Records.

2. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III – Important Mathilakam Records.

3. T.K. Velu Pillai – Mathilakam Records, Churuna 2602, Ols 224-226.

99. K. Maheswaran Nair – Chronicles of Trivandrum Pagoda.

100. Sources same as in Note 96.

1. Churuna 2601, Ola 189.

101. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III – Important Mathilakam Records - Churuna 2601, Ola 167.



Adithya Varma and Unni Kerala Varma issued a mandate for necessary enquiry to be held in this matter by the *Ettara Yogam*. Records of thefts in the Temple and punishments awarded appear repeatedly in the chronicles. Possibly clashing factions made it easier to get around safeguards and commit thefts without detection. One point of note in the *Churuna* is its wording. Orders were issued only for the conduct of enquiry and not for subsequent action, which was reserved for the king. Many times, in the event of a king being weak, he would be relegated to the position of a mere figure head. These two royal personalities were strong and did not bow to the *Yogam* as is seen from the timely successful handling the disquiet and confusion of the time.

A few years hence, the Malayalam era 739 ME / 1564 AD witnessed a miracle in the form of flow of milk on the eastern side of the *Mukha Mandapam* (or *Ottakkal Mandapam* as it was famed) This was considered a good omen. The King witnessed it.<sup>102</sup> (Refer chapter *Miracles*)

Instructions were jointly issued by these two royal personages for conducting *Sahasranamajapam* (recital of the thousand sacred names of Lord Vishnu) in the Thiru Ampati. This was in the month of *Tulam* (October/November) in 740 ME/1564 AD.<sup>103</sup>

Another event worth mentioning took place a few months hence in the same year. After a scuffle between the Temple tenants and the king's men, the former hoisted a red flag as a sign of protest on the Western gateway (*Gopuram*) of the Temple.<sup>104</sup> Even in those days the utilisation of the red flag to indicate protest seems to have been in vogue. This flag was termed *Uirakoti* (blood flag).

The King, along with Unni Kerala Varma, made provision from the *Sreebhandaram* (treasury) for the continued performance of *Ganapathy Homam*, *Japam* and *Namaskaram* (oblations and ritualistic worship) in the Temple, that year itself.<sup>105</sup> The next year i.e. in 741 ME/1566 AD the Panchagavyathu Nambi passed away. In consultation with the chronicles, subsequent steps were adopted (Refer chapter *Worship of the Celestials*).<sup>106</sup>

The fourteenth day in the month of *Thulam* (October/November) in the Malayalam year 741 ME/1565 AD saw the foundation being laid for a land mark in the construction of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple-magnificent

102. *Mathilakam Records* – *Churuna* 25, *Ola* 75.

103. T.K. Velu Pillai – *Mathilakam Records* - *Churuna* 1673, *Ola* 68 and *Temple Records*.

104. *Sources same as in 11 Churuna* 179, *Ola* 19.

105. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records* - (*Huzur Central Series Vol. III* - *Churuna* 25, *Olas* 33 and 34).

106. *Mathilakam Records* – *Churuna* 2A, *Ola* 26.



Eastern *Gopuram*<sup>107</sup> (even though centuries had to march by before its completion). Thottakkattu Ashari was in charge of the ceremony carried out as per traditional norms. In chronicles on this event King Adithya Varma is cited as the Senior Thiruvadi; a co-regent too is mentioned.<sup>108</sup> This can only be because of the power shared by Unni Kerala Varma. Many such instances have been quoted here already. From the nature of his duties it can be concluded that this prince officiated as the Thrippappoor Mooppan very often.

Despite the obvious powers enjoyed by Unni Kerala Varma, by decree and accepted tradition, because he hailed from Desinganad Swaroopam he could never put forth a claim to the Throne unless by adoption into one of the three other branches which had the rights of rulership. As such by the year 743 ME/ 1568 AD, the name of another prince becomes very prominent, coinciding with the conspicuous absence of the name of Unni Kerala Varma thereafter. It could be that this co-regent either withdrew from Temple affairs or that his demise occurred.

### Veera Marthanda Varma or Veera Udaya Marthanda Varma

This prince by name Veera Marthanda Varma or Veera Udaya Marthanda Varma was the next to become the King. The importance of his canons assure him a place of his own in the pages of history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

The first available chronicles containing this ruler's decrees are his most significant ones too and are dated 743 ME/1568 AD. On 17-7-743 ME he obtained the final assent from the *Ettara Yogam* for appointment of the famed Tarananalloor Namboodiripads as Tantries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>109</sup> They had been officiating for long and off and on the rulers had appointed them in this supreme position. Since the fluctuations of time should not affect the permanent nature of relationship of the Tantri with the Temple, this decree was issued in the form of a standing safeguard.

Udaya Marthanda Varma was far-sighted and a strong personage. Just as he ensured the status of the Tantri, in the matter of a couple of months he promulgated an ordinance which would ensure the position of the King and the Royal Family on the canvas of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. On 15-9-743 ME/1568 AD came the formal historic appointment of 'Sree Padmanabha Dasas' in the service of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple

107. *Mathilakam Manual* – Churuna 2A, Ola 12 and many other reference works including Dr. A.G. Menon's 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758'.

108. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

109. Dr. K. Maheswaran Nair – *Chronicles of the Trivandrum Pagoda*.



with complete enumeration of rights, duties and privileges. This was made by the *Ettara Yogam* with full order of appointment.<sup>110</sup>

The above mentioned record serves to highlight another aspect as well. It contradicts the popular belief that the glorious title of 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' came to the male members of the Travancore Royal family after the *Thrippati Danam*. This title was with the family very much back on the time scale, as had already been seen earlier. The submission of the male children in babyhood itself to Sree Padmanabha Swamy as His own<sup>111</sup> was a tradition adopted a long time ago and is an ongoing custom. It was sanctified and officially sealed as complete surrender by the *Thrippati Danam*.

The procedure to be followed in the appointment of a Nambi and the rules governing his conduct were chalked out on 19-9-743 ME/1568 AD.<sup>112</sup>

A distressing happening was the suspension of the *Utsavam* (festival) in the Temple for a long period of time following the traumatic course of events including bloody skirmishes between the two power blocks, paucity of funds and general mismanagement.<sup>113</sup> From time to time the different royal personages strove to set the records straight and some of them met with reasonable success but the records state how the festival stood suspended, despite all endeavours, for a shockingly long period from 558 to 762 ME/1383-1587 AD.<sup>114</sup> It was obvious that this state of affairs had to be rectified without further delay. The name of Keezhperur Veera Unni Kerala Varma features in the manuscript relating to the period 762 ME/1587 AD and thereafter. It is assumed that he would have operated in the role of co-regent along with King Udaya Marthanda Varma. Besides other members of the Royal Family including the Thrippappoor Mooppan designate, he was deputed to hold consultations with the *Ettara Yogam* and the *Sabhanjitha* on this vital issue in the presence of the Swamiyar, who was indispensable. It was decided to renew the festival immediately on condition that the members of the Royal Family pay fines for the wrongs committed not only by them but by their ancestors also. (A past record of a much earlier date, already mentioned in this chapter, reveals how the *Yogam* stipulated compensation to be paid as penalty by the then king to ensure the smooth conduct of the temple affairs. Though he agreed he defaulted leading to the suspension of the festival in the Thirteen Hundreds).

110. Dr. K. Maheswaran Nair – *Chronicles of the Trivandrum Pagoda*.

111. This is a commonly followed custom in the present times too and people submit their babies to temples of their choice.

112. Dr. K. Maheswaran Nair – *Chronicles of the Trivandrum Pagoda*.

113. *Mathilakam Granthavari Volume – I, page 144, Document 174*.

114. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records*.



The events of 762 ME /1587 AD are directly related to those past events. There upon detailed preparations commenced for the *Alpashi* festival.<sup>115</sup>

The *Palli Vetta* ceremony (the symbolic holy hunt) of the *Alpashi* festival was conducted on 26.3.763 ME/1587 AD as in the days of old.<sup>116</sup> It would have been a moving experience and has been dwelt on at great length in the Temple scrolls. It is being reproduced here in an abridged form:

*"For the Alpashi Palli Vetta of Perumal Sree Padmanabha Perumal, the Senior Thiruvadi of Thrippappoor, Elaya Thrippappoor Mootha Thiruvadi, Iravi Varma, Rama Varma, Adithya Varma, Marthanda Varma and Rama Varma were present to lead the procession of the Lords, which was a splendid one composed of foot and horse, caparisoned elephants and other pageantry. The procession went out of the Temple through the Western Gate. The Mootha Amma Thampuram (the seniormost lady member of the Royal Family) made offerings and worshipped the Deities at the appointed place. After the Vetta, the procession wended its way back and entered the Temple through the Northern Gate."*<sup>117</sup> (This age-old ceremony continues). In this record the name of Bhoothala Rama Varma appears. He would have been the Thrippappoor Mooppan.

The next day witnessed the concluding ceremonies of this normally ten day festival with the grand and still famous *Arat* procession and holy bath of the Idols at the Shanghumughom Beach.<sup>118</sup> One distinctive difference was that as a special case the festival was celebrated for twelve days.<sup>119</sup>

On 18-3-763 ME/1587 AD the *Ettara Yogam* met to deliberate on the repairs of the *Mukha Mandapam* and the *Abhishravana Mandapam*.<sup>120</sup>

The King, with justification, had little faith in the authenticity of the prevailing accounting system which he felt came under the sway of hostile elements striving to destabilise the Throne. So he established a post of Temple accountant termed *Karanakkanakkan*, which became a hereditary post.<sup>121</sup>

115. Sources same as Note 112 and Mathilakam Manual - Churuna 1673, Ola 113.

116. Sources same as above - Churunas 1691 and 1686, Olas 47, 48 and 57.

117. Senior Thiruvadi of Thrippappoor would be the King who must have hailed from the Thrippappoor branch, and not the Thrippappoor Mooppan who would be Elaya Thrippappoor Mootha Thiruvadi. (The Mootha or senior would have been incorporated, as the Thrippappoor Mooppan designate is also mentioned in the deliberations and as a participant in the procession also).

118. Mathilakam Records - Churuna 2601, Ola 110.

119. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer - Important Mathilakam Records - Churuna 1283, Olas 194 to 196.

120. Mathilakam Records - Churuna 1719, Ola 122.

121. 1. Mathilakam Records of 19.3.763 ME/1587AD.

2. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer - Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III.



There is another scroll in the Temple written in 763 ME/1587 AD itself which re-establishes that Udaya Marthanda Varma was the Chiravayi Mooppan and King at that time.<sup>122</sup> It also goes on to state that the Temple was guarded by the military guard of the King and not by the Temple staff. Such facts emphasise that the King was no weakling and was forceful enough to hold his own against voices of dissent from the *Yogam*. Veera Udaya Marthanda Varma's kingship becomes a vital period in the evolution of the medieval history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. His contributions to its stability and security can never be under-estimated or banished into oblivion.

### Bhoothala Rama Varma

This King who came next also continued to bestow a lot of attention on Temple matters. In 766 ME/1591 AD he showed great interest in the *Siveli* Idols and recorded their details.<sup>123</sup> Even as the junior prince, he had evinced active concern in the Temple and was much involved in it.

Another unusual event is found entered in the records. It states that in 768 ME/1593 AD, a *Manikyam* (precious gem) was discovered in the Temple grounds during this King's reign.<sup>124</sup>

### Thrikketta Thirunal Veera Ravi Varma (Veera Ravi Ravi Varma)

This illustrious ruler hailing from the *Thrippappoor Keezhperur* branch reigned from 771 ME/1595 AD to 784 ME/1608 AD.<sup>125</sup> He left for posterity memories of great devotion and service.

King Ravi Ravi Varma was a deeply pious individual much involved in repairing Temples and performing religious ceremonies, for which he set apart the lion's share of his time, energy and resources. Even before he ascended the Throne he had launched a repair and renovation programme of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple on an extensive scale in 761 ME/1592 AD. There is a lengthy document available in the Temple records giving the names in chronological order of the successive kings who continued the renovation started by Ravi Ravi Varma and extending up to the period of Unni Kerala Varma, whose name appears on the records of the Malayalam era 795 ME/1620 AD.<sup>126</sup>

122. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records - Huzur Central Records - Churuna 1686, Ola 47.*

123. 1. Dr. V.S. Sharma – *Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham*. This book gives the King's name which is absent in other records.

2. *Mathilakam Records on Siveli idols.*

124. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records - Churuna 25, Ola 35.*

125. Document No. XV – *Mathilakam Records.*

126. Document No. XV – *Mathilakam Records.*



Perhaps during the time when that the work was in progress, on 9.2.768 ME/1592 AD, a ruby was discovered in the courtyard.<sup>127</sup> On 3rd *Dhanu*, 769 ME/1593 AD, the princesses of Thrippappoor Swaroopam are seen going for *Bhajanam* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple<sup>128</sup> *Bhajanam* is a significant aspect of worship and exhibits the faith of those performing it.

On 21.10.771 ME/1596 AD Veera Ravi Ravi Varma was ordained as the Chiravayi Mooppan.<sup>129</sup> In the same year there arose a dispute on the appointment of the Panchagavyathu Nambi between two members of the *Ettara Yogam*. The matter was settled after recourse to the old records of the Temple.<sup>130</sup>

Even after being exalted as the Chiravayi Mooppan, this King continued to keep up his involvement in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Just a year previously he had done a lot for the upkeep of the Thiruvattar Sree Adi Kesava Perumal Temple with which close bonds existed from ancient times. In this Temple at Thiruvattar many inscriptions can be found detailing this and his family's services to it. He had the *Kalasam* ceremony also performed there in 770 ME/1595 AD<sup>131</sup> Numerous inscriptions relating to him are found scattered in many parts of that area.

Ravi Ravi Varma's emotional bond with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple only gained in strength with the passage of time. He, with his family, contributed in ample measure to its repairs and to many other temples also, becoming well-known in those days as the Royal Temple Builder.<sup>132</sup> He performed the *Thulapurusha Danam* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. It is an offering of considerable proportions. This was done in 776 ME/1601 AD. The title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal' became appended to his name.<sup>133</sup> A *Mandapam* was built to commemorate this event. In an inscription in the Temple it is revealed that the two consorts of this King, Irayummaikkutti Amma and Elaya Irayummaikkutti Amma, completed the construction of the same which came to be known as *Thulapurusha Mandapam* on the 12th of the month of *Mithunam* 776 ME/1601 AD.<sup>134</sup>

---

127. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 1673, Ola 82.

128. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 1673, Ola 90.

129. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2304, Ola 224.

130. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna details not available, year 771 ME.

131. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 27, Ola 174.

132. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.

3. A. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

133. *Mathilakam Records* – Churunas 1673, 1691, 1727 etc.

134. (a) *Mathilakam Records*.

(b) Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.



An interesting chronicle records the contribution of Veera Kerala Varma, the King of Cochin, to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple treasury in 779 ME/1604 AD.<sup>135</sup> In those days when distances were considerable, travel was not easy and relations were not cordial such acts assumed special significance.

One important event was the restarting of the *Karuvelamkulam Puja* held in suspense for want of funds.<sup>136</sup> This took place in 780 ME/1605 AD (The history of this particular *Puja* has already been elaborated earlier in this chapter).

The year 781 ME/1606 AD, saw great strides being taken in the renovation and structural repair of the Temple. While the original features were all retained, one great change was the substitution of wood, which was in compliance with Kerala Temple architecture, by stone.<sup>137</sup> This medium was adopted for fear of fire hazard. There was full consent and co-operation from the *Ettara Yogam* and others for the work and a subscription list was opened and donations accepted for the Temple.

Round about this time Veera Rama Varma assumes importance as Thrippappoor Mooppan. His active supervision was in evidence at all stages.

In 781 ME itself, on the 3rd of *Thulam (Alpashi)* or October 1605 AD the *Vathil Madom*, *Belikkalppura*, *Thirumadappally*, *Nel Muri*, *Chuttambalam* and *Neerazhi* were demolished and the trench for the basement cleared.<sup>138</sup> In the same year, in the month of *Thai (Makaram)*, on the 7th day, the basement being ready, work on the double-storied structure, the *Malika*, commenced.

Most unfortunately, even in the midst of all this activity of renovation, disaster struck in the year 782 ME/1607 AD. A fire broke out in the *Balalayam* (temporary abode) of the *Perumal*. The chronicles describe the event thus, "*The God's bed catches fire.*"<sup>139</sup> By divine intervention it was brought under control before too much damage could be wrought.

One interesting record throws light on the many demands on the King's time and the personal attention bestowed on them by him. The journey of Veera

135. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 673, Ola 86 (name of ruler not mentioned but obtained from Dr. V.S. Sharma's book '*Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham*').

136. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 94, Ola 106.

137. *Mathilakam Records* – Churunas 1719, 2602, Ola 16.6.34, dated 27.3.781 ME/1605 AD.

138. Dr. R.P. Raja from *Mathilakam Record No. XV*.

1. Two *Mandapams* flanking the central passage of the outer enclosed area - *Vathil Madam*.

2. The area where the Big *Belikkal* stands - *Belikkalppura* (though this term is not being used in *Padhathi* temples)

3. Lord's Kitchen – *Thiru Madappally*.

4. Granary – *Nel Muri*.

5. Space outside the enclosed area around sanctum - *Chuttambalam*.

6. Holy Tank – *Neerazhippura*.

139. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2602, Ola 16.



Ravi Ravi Varma to Madurai in 782 ME/1607 AD to purchase good quality horses is described.<sup>140</sup> He obviously did not believe in delegation of important duties. He brought back with him forty five horses after attending a royal wedding in the Pandyan King's household on his way, as a gesture of friendship.

On 17.12.783 ME/1607 AD the *Patiyettam* of this King is described. He made donation in money to the Temple on that occasion. Like others before him in the Royal Family, countless were the offerings of all kinds the King heaped at the feet of the Lord, sometimes to mark events and occasions, sometimes in pure outpouring of devotion and adoration. A fight against the *Elayidathu Swaroopam* (Kottarakkara) in 783 ME/1608 AD is mentioned and the money was submitted after the battle as a gesture of gratitude.

This many-faceted Sovereign, Ravi Ravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal, was a well known scholar as well. The curtain rang down on his glorious reign in 784 ME/1608 AD.

Ravi Ravi Varma was succeeded by Rama Varma of Thrippappoor Keezhperur branch in 784 ME/1608 AD. Even as the Thrippappoor Mooppan he had been closely associated with the Temple affairs and the renovation was started in full swing by him. In his lamentably brief reign of just eleven months, he did whatever he could in the reconstruction process.<sup>141</sup> There is one chronicle which states an event of a serious nature. It records the damage caused by white ants to the Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.<sup>142</sup> The King was informed of this but he passed away before he could initiate necessary action in 785 ME/1609 AD.

The next two rulers Adithya Varma and Elaya Rama Varma also were short-lived but continued the work in the Temple during their brief tenure.

### Revathi Thirunal Veera Iravi Iravi Varma

In the year 786 ME/1611 AD Veera Iravi Iravi Varma became the King or Chiravayi Mooppan.<sup>143</sup> In direct contrast to the three rulers immediately before him whose rulership extended to only a matter of months, this King's reign was the longest among the medieval *Chiravayi* rulers. As such he was granted time and opportunity to render many services to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which, with his very pious disposition, he was able to carry out exceedingly well.

140. 1. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1438, Ola 95.*

2. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1673, Ola 73.*

141. *Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Important Mathilakam Records - (Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III).*

142. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1673, Ola 131.*

143. *Mathilakam Records – Document No. XV.*



The work which had been started on a large scale by King Ravi Ravi Varma in 781 ME/1605 AD had been continuing without interruption despite the quick changes in the rulers. When Iravi Iravi Varma became the ruler, the work assumed a faster tempo.<sup>144</sup> The first floor of the sanctum was finished in granite and the next two floors in wood. The Queen and princesses of Attingal royalty, who formed the taproot of the Thrippappoor dynasty, had always kept close touch with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The importance of their association with it is reflected off and on in the recording of their coming to the Temple each time. In the same way we find two scrolls during this period, one in 786 ME/1611 AD and the next in 789 ME/1613 AD which state the worship of the Princesses of Attingal at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and one record of the Rani of Attingal – the Mootha Thampuran – offering an amount of money to the Temple<sup>145</sup> (*Thampuran* which is the normal male term of reference of the Kshatriya caste is also used commonly for Kshatriya ladies of certain families).

During the reign of Iravi Iravi Varma, Unni Kerala Varma of Desinganad Swaroopam is seen to have enjoyed power, privileges and position almost equating him to the status of a co-regent. He was the seniormost member of his branch. An instance of the authority commanded by Unni Kerala Varma stands revealed in the document of 795 ME/1620 AD.<sup>146</sup> A serious allegation was levelled against Dewan Parameswaran of having stolen Temple properties. Unni Kerala Varma directed the dreaded *Kaimukku Satyam* of Suchindrom to be performed by the accused. It was done and he was judged innocent and acquittal granted to him at once.<sup>147</sup>

The renovation work in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was nearing completion and a date was fixed in 795 ME/1620 AD for the performance of *Kalasam* (purification ceremony).<sup>148</sup> Finally this had to be postponed following a row between *Akkara Desies* and *Ikkara Desies*. The Periya Nambi belonged

144. Mathilakam Records – Document No XV.

145. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Important Mathilakam Records - (Huzur Central Records Series. Vol. III).

1. Churuna 1657, Ola 71.

2. Churuna 1657, Olas 121 and 122.

146. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 94, Ola 109.

147. "Kaimukku Satyam", a dreaded process of proving innocence or guilt. Boiling oil would be kept in a vessel in Suchindrom Temple (which came within the Venad territories) and the accused would be made to dip his hand in it for a second. If it received no burn then his innocence was established and if it got burnt he would be deemed guilty. "Kaimukku Satyam" literally translates as 'truth by dipping of hand'.

148. 1. Mathilakam Records – Document No. XV.

2. T.K. Velu Pillai – Travancore State Manual



to the *Akkara Desies* but his relatives were fully engaged in conducting. *Pujas* in *Perumpadappu Swaroopam* (dynasty of Cochin) and never came to Thiruvananthapuram for many years, even upto 795 ME. So the *Neettu* (order) for performing the *Kalasam* was given to the *Ikkara Desi* priest Karikkattu Narayanan Sivan. This sparked off much disagreement between the two factions and as no compromise could be arrived at from any quarter, it culminated in the postponement of the *Kalasam* ceremony.

In the same year, the King is seen to have set off on a brief pilgrimage to Rameswaram.<sup>149</sup>

In the year 798 ME/1623 AD he directed that steps be taken for regular *Bhajanam* (rendering of devotional songs) in the Temple.<sup>150</sup> With the help of Unni Kerala Varma, he made detailed arrangements for the performance of *Pujas* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. In the next year the King instituted another offering of sweet food called, *Panthrandu Kalam Payasam*, offering of a sweet rice preparation in twelve pots.<sup>151</sup>

Since the behaviour of the *Akkara Desies* and *Ikkara Desies* was highly reprehensible resulting in the non-conduct of the *Kalasam* ceremony and hindering the smooth functioning of the Temple, King Iravi Iravi Varma and Unni Kerala Varma initiated disciplinary action against them by imposing penalties.<sup>152</sup>

In 802 ME/ 1627 AD the procedure was laid down for a very significant event in the Temple known as the *Perumthiru Amrithethu Puja* (the great royal feast of the Perumal).<sup>153</sup> This would take place twice a year after each *Samkramam* or solstice. The practice continues.

The succeeding year stood witness to the occurrence of a miracle. Milk, bubbling like boiling rice, manifested from the *Thiruvolakka Mandapam* of the Temple<sup>154</sup> (See chapter *Miracles*).

807 ME/1632 AD was an eventful year. Though the *Utsavam* had been resumed, many other festivals remained suspended for long. They were revived after conceding the demand of the *Ettara Yogam* to give in writing the

149. *Mathilakam Records*.

Prof. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

150. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records (Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III) - Churuna - 2303 Olas 241, 268, 259 and 293*.

151. *Mathilakam Records* – Churunas 1408, 1721 and & 1727, Olas 15 and 186.

152. *Mathilakam Manual* – Churuna 2A Ola 24.

153. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2191 Ola 18.

154. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2602 Olas 13 and 14.



willingness of the King to return properties unlawfully occupied by the rulers.<sup>155</sup> It is possible that this ban on the festivals might have once again thrown a shadow of menace on the *Utsavam* which had been restarted after so long a gap. Both the King and Unni Kerala Varma were strong-willed and not behind in taking corrective action, if called for, but it is clear that in certain situations they too had no option but to bow before the will of the *Yogam*. A fragmentary but significant record naming Unni Kerala Varma in a position of power states the postponement of the *Painkuni Utsavam* from the month of *Meenom* as is the custom to the next month, *Medom*.<sup>156</sup> There are entries on the *Palli Vetta* and *Arat* festivals.<sup>157</sup> An important point is that the date of the *Arat* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy is recorded as 26.9.807 ME. The 9th month is *Painkuni* and that once more proves that this festival also existed along with *Alpashi*, in olden times itself and was not started newly by Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma.

The *Ettara Yogam* assembled to adopt the future course of action since all the construction work was over.<sup>158</sup> It became imperative that the *Kalasam* be performed. Since the two groups of priests could arrive at no settlement, it was resolved after many deliberations to entrust the task to the Tantri. Unni Kerala Varma, who had actively been participating in the discussions, was deputed by Iravi Iravi Varma to be his representative for the essential *Anujna* (formal giving of consent) by the *Ettara Yogam* without which it could not take place. The *Yogam* then raised objections to this, pointing out that the senior prince of Desinganad could not deputise since he was not the Thrippappoor Mooppan. The Prince left the *Yogam* and had arrangements made for assumption of this place by him. After becoming the Thrippappoor Mooppan as per the prescribed formalities, he returned to the *Yogam*. Consent was issued then by it. The ritual of *Mulaital* preceding the *Kalasam* and the much delayed *Kalasam* ceremony were conducted by Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Padmanabhan on 17.11.807 ME/1632 AD. Veera Iravi Iravi Varma ruled for many more years and left behind him much to be remembered in the many services rendered by him in unflinching devotion.

As mentioned earlier, in many instances including dates of kings, variations appear in different texts. This has been the case with regard to the previous

---

155. *Mathilakam Records*.

156. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1686, Ola 59 dated ME 807-9-17/1632 AD*.

157. 1. *Mathilakam Records*. Churuna 2303, Ola 252.

2. Churuna 2303, Olas 260, 270 and 296, Year 26-9-807ME/1632 AD.

158. 1. *Mathilakam Records – Document No. XV*.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – ‘*A Survey of Kerala History*’.



ruler Veera Iravi Iravi Varma also. As such, it is repeated here, that the Temple records and Temple handwritten manuals have been accepted as the final deciding authority. This is again stated here for the purpose of avoiding disputes and objections about the authenticity of the dates and time slots. The fact that many kings had the same names and the presence of a junior king or Thrippappoor Mooppan as well as a co-regent in many cases has contributed to enhancing the difficulties. Readers are free to form their own opinions or go by the works of authority they adhere to but I have followed the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple *Churunas* and *Manuals* and have accepted them as right wherever differences have arisen.<sup>159</sup> Whatever those contradictions may be, by and large there seems to be consensus in opinion about succession especially after the later medieval period (which is now under survey) is reached.

### Ravi Varma and Adithya Varma

The next two rulers to ascend the throne were Ravi Varma and Adithya Varma. Both these Kings had an unusual background as they were adopted from the Vellarappalli Kovilakam of the Cochin Royal Family. Inter-adoptions seem to have existed between the States, though not as an accepted code of conduct. In the same way, the mother of these two princes was a princess of Desinganad (Quilon) Swaroopam or Jayasimhanad Swaroopam who was adopted into the Cochin Royal Family. It is relevant to note that Sri K.P. Padmanabha Menon, the eminent authority on Cochin history, had recorded that *Pulavalayma*-(pollution consequent on demise or birth respectively) existed between the royal families of Travancore and Cochin till the year 275ME/1100AD. Ravi Varma was a weak ruler and unable to stand on his own against the machinations of the *Ettara Yogam*. After his rule of nine years, which ended in 847 ME/1672 AD, Prince Adithya Varma succeeded him.

Adithya Varma was also not a strong personality and his brief tenure of five years was fraught with tensions and upheavals.<sup>160</sup> Acute differences in opinion surfaced between the King and the *Yogakkar* on issues relating to Temple management. No important matter could be put through without the prior consent of the *Yogam* and final sanction of the King. The eight *Yogakkars* divided Temple lands into eight districts, placed them under eight Nair noblemen who were known as the *Ettuveetil Pillamars* or the 'Pillais of the Eight Houses'. Originally they were just tenants of the Potties. Hence the religious authority now vested with the *Yogakkar* on sheer strength of number and the political power with the Pillamars and this posed a real menace to the royal authority.

159. In certain works there is some difference in names as in V. Nagam Aiya - *The State Manual of Travancore*.

160. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon - 'A Survey of Kerala History'.



Though mild-mannered and non-aggressive, the King was deeply pious and much concerned with the trend of affairs. He insisted on proper accounting and management of not only the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple but also of the other temples and *Devaswoms*, displeasing the *Yogakkar* and *Pillamar* still further. Frequent clashes erupted between the temple servants and the king's men in which the *Devaswom* tenants too sometimes joined, holding hands with the Temple staff. Many are the *Churunas* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple dealing with this issue and detailing the compensations and acts of atonement invariably performed by the King.

Still disputes kept on manifesting and soon they assumed such serious proportions that they paved the way for a virtual closure of the Temple for a distressing period of four years from 848 to 852 ME/1673-1677 AD.<sup>161</sup> These were the dark years in the history of this great Temple and the only time it faced such a situation for an extended length of time. This state of affairs could not obviously go on and it was then that the Senior Rani of Attingal intervened. She had the full support of King Adithya Varma himself and as a result of their joint efforts some order was restored and the Temple re-opened. This brought immense satisfaction to the troubled King but his peace of mind was short-lived. Quarrels continued to fester, leading to the suspension of some of the religious ceremonies even though the Temple was open. The King moved to a Palace in Kalkulam—present day Padmanabhapuram (his own Palace at Thiruvananthapuram having been burnt down due to the instigations of the Pillamar and their patrons); He died heart-broken in 852 ME/1677 AD (though there is a view that the year was 853 ME). Different versions exist about his end but they are not fully substantiated. His reign is an example of the anguish of a great devotee—ruler, unable to serve God the way he longed due to adverse conspiracy of circumstances. Modern history, many years hence, has a parallel to offer in one of her greatest sons, Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma.

### **Aswathi Thirunal Umayamma Rani, Mootha Thampuran of Attingal – Regent Queen**

Umayamma Rani's name is etched deep in the monument of glory of the medieval history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. It is almost incredible that a lady of her background could face and triumph over such a concentration of adversity which challenged her at every point, whether it be the Temple, the State, external forces or personal life. Grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the indomitable will that was her asset, saw her through.

161. 1. *Mathilakam Records*

2. *Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.*

3. *V. Nagam Aiya – The State Manual of Travancore.*



Umayamma Rani would have had the first exposure to the fire of unrest smouldering within the *Ettara Yogam* and the 'Pillais of the Eight Houses' during the terrible years when the Temple lay closed and later when some compromise was arrived at under the leadership of her elder sister, the then seniormost royal lady of the Attingal Royal House. Events following the re-opening of the Temple too proved to be of a disturbing nature. When the Queen took over the reins of administration as the Regent, the civil system was at sixes and sevens and trouble was seething all over, the Temple being no exception.

The Queen was highly efficient, and forceful.<sup>162</sup> Immediately on assuming office in 852 ME/1677 AD, she set the wheels in motion to regularise the accounts of income and expenditure of the Temple in conformity with the system of the bygone years. This task was newly entrusted to six *Pillais* of Karavarkaram (not to be confused with any one belonging to the Eight Houses of Pillamar). The *Yogakkar* were commanded to submit detailed accounts which were subject to audit. The guilty were punished. All this caused much resentment, but the Queen was so strong that the *Yogakkar* were unable to openly defy her.

The Queen also took another step which violated tradition even though she was aware that it could invite grave repercussions on her head. She ignored the mandate which forbade any Attingal princess to cross the Karamana river on pain of forfeiting her Sovereign rights. She shifted to Thiruvananthapuram (where personal tragedy befell her) so that she could directly oversee and control the administration of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the State.<sup>163</sup> In the self-same year (852 ME), she ordered that a broad road be laid out for the *Arat* procession of the Perumal to the sea shore.<sup>164</sup> It had pride of place in the city.

The Queen was uncompromising when it came to the proper conduct of the rites and festivals of this Temple. While in the capital she would go daily to the Temple and partake of food only after the noon worship. It is on record that due to non-performance of this *Puja*, she abstained from food for that entire day.

The subsequent year saw the threatened invasion of a marauding Muslim commonly referred to as *Mukilan*. He came up to Manacaud and camped

162. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – 'A Survey of Kerala History'.

3. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

163. It is said that five of the Queen's six sons were brutally murdered by drowning them in the *Kalippankulam* (a tank). The next King to succeed her was a child, hence the period of regency. His name was *Iravi Varma* or *Ravi Varma*. While the popular history states that he was her only son, there is another viewpoint that he was adopted by Umayamma Rani.

164. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records* (Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III) Churuna 24, Ola 132.



there with his men. There are stories of how the Muslims of that area went and pleaded with him not to attack the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. To turn him away from plundering the Temple wealth, these Muslims are said to have gone to the extent of taking a collection of money from amongst themselves to be offered to him. The Rani who was staying in a Palace in Nedumancaud (it is still there) found it necessary to enlist help as pressures were mounting from all sides. She invited a valiant prince by name Kerala Varma from Kottayam (in Malabar) to help her. He was successful in defeating Mukilan and routing him from that area. The grateful Queen, impressed by his capacity and courage, adopted him into the family as the junior prince of Eraniel. Both of them being strong personalities, they introduced sweeping social reforms and stricter control on Temple administration was enforced.

In 853 ME/1678 AD on the 17th of the tenth month, a startling phenomenon occurred in the Temple.<sup>165</sup> Blood was seen oozing from the Temple wall (Refer chapter *Miracles*). This was certainly a bad omen and was taken as a sign of Divine wrath. The enraged *Yogakkar* were utilising every possible chance to disrupt the smooth functioning of the Temple, as such *Pujas* got suspended off and on even though a total closure did not happen. The sight of blood was attributed to this. Some claimed this omen to be the Lord's displeasure caused by the action of the then Chiravayi Mooppan Adithya Varma in 851 ME/1676 AD of ignoring the Desinganad Swaroopam. The second interpretation appears very far fetched and might have been propagated by vested interests. With the strong backing of Kerala Varma, concerted attempts were made to restore the *Pujas* soon after. During this period mysterious appearance of snakes, also was noticed many times within the Temple premises.

Kottayam Kerala Varma was a great scholar and a great devotee of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Standing at the feet of the Lord, he translated the first five *kandas* of *Valmiki Ramayanam*, into Malayalam. This work is known as *Kerala Varma Ramayanam*. (Refer chapter *Search of Sources*.)

## Iravi Varma

On reaching the age of maturity, in 860 ME/1685 AD, Iravi Varma took over from Umayamma Rani. Trained under her, he too possessed many of her qualities. Moreover he took the guidance of the Regent Queen on all real issues. So much so it is seen that their names appear jointly on many Temple records.<sup>166</sup>

165. 1. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records* (Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III) Churuna 1602, Ola 15, Churuna 25, Ola 12.

2. P. Shangoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

166. 1. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Some Important Mathilakam Records* (Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III).

2. *Mathilakam Records*.

3. Dr. A. G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758'.



The years 860 and 861 ME/1685 and 1686 AD were full of action as far as the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was concerned. Though earnest attempts had been made to resume the *Pujas*, it was not smooth sailing. They had been suspended in 848 ME/1673 AD following a theft in the Temple. The joint order of 860 ME/1685 AD of Iravi Varma and Umayamma Rani has gone on record issuing instructions for restarting the ceremonies and *Pujas*. Despite this they got delayed due to serious differences of opinion, especially between the Rani on one side and some very influential men from Kalkulam on the other. Omens had also manifested. Things came to a head when the people invited Veera Kerala Varma of *Pera Thazhavi* to head the affairs of the State.<sup>167</sup> He readily agreed and proceeded with the arrangements on a grand scale with the support of Tarananalloor Namboodiripad, Tantri of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This attempt however failed.<sup>168</sup> Kerala Varma, who had been hostile to the Queen, was unable to establish his overlordship. Iravi Varma promptly removed the said Tantri and appointed Takarappuratu Namboodiri in his place. Thenceforth the *Pujas* and other rituals were restarted and continued as in the good days of the past. During that year an unfortunate break in the *Pushpanjali*, which is of the utmost importance, occurred due to the *Samadhi* (demise of a saint) of the Pushpanjali Swamiyar.<sup>169</sup> After a brief lapse, under the orders of the Chiravayi Mooppan Iravi Varma, it was recommenced.

Iravi Varma was destined to face a terrible ordeal of fire in the literal and figurative sense of the term. In the year 861 ME/1686 AD, disaster struck again. From the Temple records it is clear that the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple had many a time been prey to fire. It was this which had led to the substitution of wood by granite. Yet, in the fatal year 861 ME/1686 AD, a great fire broke out in the Temple.<sup>170</sup> It played havoc leaving behind a trail of destruction. It attacked the *Abhishravana Mandapam*, the shrine of Sree Narasimha Swamy and swept into the actual sanctum itself, melting the metal utensils and the lamps and causing the granite structures to explode with the noise of great claps of thunder. The fire raged in unabated fury for one and half days despite desperate attempts of countless number of people who slaved without respite and with scant concern for personal safety, to extinguish it. As a terrible finale, the roof of the sanctum crashed in a burning mass of flames on

167. Veera Kerala Varma's anger at being supposedly side-lined by Umayamma Rani, the ensuing misunderstanding leading to armed conflict of the troops from both sides, the inconclusive ending of the wars and subsequent political adjustments, all feature in history.

168. Mathilakam Records.

169. Mathilakam Manual – Churuna 2602, Olas 170-175 year 860 ME/1685 AD.

170. 1. Mathilakam Manual.

2. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Important Mathilakam Records, (Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III).

3. Dr. A. G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758.'



the actual Idol of wood itself. It was then that another miracle was witnessed in the form of incredible Divine intervention. Despite the ferocity and destructive force of the uncontrolled fire and the fact that the Idol which took the brunt of roof collapse was fashioned out of wood, the Idol remained unharmed except for the loss of three fingers in the left hand and all toes of the left leg. That was living proof of the great grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy on those whose lives were committed in service of Him. Had the Idol been destroyed, the enormity of that holocaust would have been unimaginable. Iravi Varma promulgated an ordinance for immediate restoration. He performed the *Dahana Prayaschitham*. Further details are not available except that repairs were done at once.<sup>171</sup>

Iravi Varma passed away in 893 ME/1718 AD after a reign which was at a critically sensitive period in the medieval history of the Temple and which he was able to tackle with commendable success.

## Adithya Varma

Iravi Varma was succeeded by Adithya Varma, who ruled for a few years only.<sup>172</sup> The challenge to royal authority by the *Yogakkar* and their partisans had once again raised its hood and had assumed menacing proportions.<sup>173</sup> Steps adopted by the King's officers to recover dues from the tenants of *Devaswom* lands led to skirmishes between the two factions in which many including some Potties were injured. Cultivation almost came to a standstill. Agricultural commodities, especially paddy needed for the Temple, came from these *Devaswom* lands as its dues. Confrontations between the King's men and the tenants continued. The tenants approached the King, in a politically motivated move, to get redress and since that was not forthcoming they marched to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and, as had been done previously too in another reign, hoisted a red flag before the Western *Gopuram* (tower) as a mark of protest, after submitting their grievances to the *Yogakkar*. This incident is recorded in the Temple scrolls.

Adithya Varma has been mentioned in the records of 894 ME /1719 AD as the Chiravayi Mooppan.<sup>174</sup> His reign appears to have been from 893-896 ME / 1718-1721 AD. In a record of 894 ME itself the name of Unni

171. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records (Huzur Central Series) Churuna 44, Olas 1-41.*

172. According to the *State Manual of Travancore* by Nagam Aiya, it was Unni Kerala Varma who succeeded Iravi Varma. But as the *Mathilakam Chronicles* differ and give the name as Adithya Varma, who was in turn succeeded by Unni Kerala Varma, that is being followed here also. Dr. V.S. Sharma too supports this view.

173. 1. *Mathilakam Records.*

2. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon – '*A Survey of Kerala History*'.

174. *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Granthavari 1, Ola 293.*



Kerala Varma features. He would have been the Thrippappoor Mooppan and next in line to the Throne. He is seen to have remitted certain amounts as amercement for some acts of Temple mismanagement. In the same year a grave event occurred in the Temple in the form of a series of thefts.<sup>175</sup> Worse still, the Idol of the Bhoomi Devi used for *Abhishekam* also got stolen. Following the precedent by which royalty often had to pay penalties and fines for wrongs seen in the Temple which were not committed by them, Adithya Varma had to offer two elephants and some money to the Temple.

894 ME/1718 AD also saw the adoption of *Atiyara Illom*.<sup>176</sup> Many such adoptions are noticed and in these cases these *Illoms* were expected to perform certain specified functions and assume certain responsibilities connected with the Temple in return. The point to note here is that in this record also Adithya Varma is mentioned as Chiravayi Mooppan (though along with Unni Kerala Varma), once again refuting the claim of certain historical texts which place Unni Kerala Varma as the next king after Iravi Varma.

### Unni Kerala Varma

He succeeded to the Throne in 896 ME/1721 AD and was one among the two princes and two princesses adopted from Kola Swaroopam by Umayamma Rani and Iravi Varma.<sup>177</sup> They were all born of the same parents and Unni Kerala Varma was the elder brother and Veera Rama Varma the younger. Though this is not a historical work on the Travancore Dynasty, this is being mentioned to highlight their inextricable destiny since the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the Throne of Venad are inseparably intertwined. Moreover this collective adoption has a significance other than political or dynastic. It is of particular interest to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, as one of the princesses adopted had the good fortune to give birth to one of the greatest devotee kings in a long illustrious line of adoration and worship. He was none other than Sree Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma, 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' in the highest sense and 'Maker of Modern Travancore'.<sup>178</sup>

Unni Kerala Varma was a weak King and failed to establish control or initiate correction on the misconduct of the *Yogakkar* and their supporters. During his short reign of three years, he was not able to contribute much to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Moreover in the year of his assumption itself i.e. 896 ME/1721 AD, once again the *Pujas* got suspended; this time due to the

175. 1. Dr. K. Maheswaran Nair – *Chronicles of Trivandrum Pagoda*.

2. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Important Mathilakam Records (Huzur Central Records Series Vol. III) - Churuna 23, Olas 3-5*.

176. Dr. K. Maheswaran Nair – *Chronicles of Trivandrum Pagoda*.

177. Many are the historical works which state these adoptions, other than dynastic and family records.

178. Refer section on Modern History of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.



paucity of funds.<sup>179</sup> Veera Rama Varma's name is mentioned on the record probably because, he was the Thrippappoor Mooppan. One important event is that he adopted one more princess from Kola Swaroopam, as only one of his two sisters had given birth to a male child. This adoption too has great relevance to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as this princess was to give to the Temple and to the land, yet another ruler of very high esteem, Sree Padmanabha Dasa Karthika Thirunal Dharmaraja Rama Varma of lasting fame.<sup>180</sup>

## Veera Rama Varma

Veera Rama Varma, brother of Unni Kerala Varma, became the next ruler in 899 ME/1724 AD following his elder brother's demise. He ruled till 903 ME/1728 AD.

The reconstruction which was an ongoing process following the great fire of 861 ME/ 1686 in Iravi Varma's time, continued in 899 ME/ 1724 AD itself in full force though it had received a setback in the previous years.<sup>181</sup>

This King too was deeply dedicated to his dynastic Deity and the well-being of the Temple. Rama Varma's rule is of great note as this far-sighted Sovereign saw the considerable potential of his nephew Marthanda Varma and did all he could to make him aware of the traumas of administration of the Temple and the Throne and to train him in the best possible way to face what lay ahead of him. Since insight into the unborn years is denied to ordinary mortals, even Rama Varma who had considerable exposure to the simmering unrest could not have dreamt of the enormity of the legacy of love and danger he was bequeathing to the nephew he held so dear.

As part of the grooming process, since Rama Varma depended on and had great faith in his nephew even from his younger days, he deputed Marthanda Varma, who was the Elayaraja, to represent him on many occasions. Records state that the *Ettara Yogam* held its deliberations under the leadership of this dynamic prince.<sup>182</sup> The *Pujas* in the Temple had once again come to a halt even when Veera Rama Varma was the Thrippappoor Mooppan, in 896 ME/ 1721 AD. This was the result of the high-handed action taken by Rama Varma's men in the temple estate in Veeranarayanasherri. It is assumed that one of the usual conflicts which were rife in the medieval period of this Temple, would have taken place resulting in casualties. This is inferred as the record goes on to state that the bodies of the dead men were brought and placed at the western *gopuram* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple with the Temple staff

179. T.K. Velu Pillai - *Mathilakam Records* - Churuna 1408, Ola 48.

180. Refer section on Modern History of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

181. *Mathilakam Manual*.

182. *Mathilakam Granthavari* 15, Olas 4 and 5.



clamouring for redress of their grievances. After much negotiations the *Anujna* was granted from the *Ettara Yogam* and *Pujas* were resumed.

Though a record of the period of Iravi Varma which deals with the great fire in the Temple in the year 861 ME/1686 AD states that the penance for the outbreak of the fire was duly performed by him, there appears another Temple record of the time of Veera Rama Varma in 903 ME/ 1728 AD in which he is also seen doing *Dahana Prayaschitham* for this same dread event of 861 ME.<sup>183</sup> In that year itself the main *Vigraham* (Idol) was shifted to the *Balalayam* for repair. The King also had a new *Sreebeli* Idol of the Lord cast in silver.<sup>184</sup>

Veera Rama Varma had two sons, Padmanabhan Thampi (Pappu Thampi) and Raman Thampi. They were deeply hostile to Marthanda Varma even during the time of their father's rule. The Ettuveetil Pillamar (Pillais of The Eight Houses), who had originally been tillers of the land, under the protective mantle of the Potties of the *Ettara Yogam* who were sworn enemies of royalty in principle and of the Elayaraja in particular, were only too ready to join hands with them to take over the Crown. Treason and terror fermented as plots were continually hatched in mad lust for the blue blood of the Prince. It is in this backdrop of kaleidoscopic events that Rama Varma passes away in 903 ME/ 1728 AD and the medieval era marches on to meet with the modern times.

## Modern History of The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple

The uninterrupted progress of this sacred institution in the current era takes its birth with the accession of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma to the fabled Throne of Travancore, following the demise of his uncle Maharaja Rama Varma in 904 ME / 1729 AD.

Though it had been customary for a long time to make the asterism as the mark of identity of a royal personage, possibly because of the limited choice of available names and consequent frequent repetition, from the time of Marthanda Varma it became the established practice. All the rulers as well as members of the Royal Family included the star before their actual names and many of them were known more by the asterism as is seen in the ensuing chapters.

An opinion could be formed in the minds of the readers that the following pages have been utilised for projecting the family history also. It is indeed true that in each chapter under Modern History, services other than those directly rendered to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the administrative reforms at large and some of the important historical events find a place as we proceed.

183. *Temple Manual*.

184. T.K. Velu Pillai – *Mathilakam Records - Churuna 1673, Ola 27 903 ME*.



This is because down the convoluted course of events, the Temple and the throne were indivisibly bound, the bondage to divinity gaining in strength and depth with the Gift Deed of Total Dedication of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma by which he surrendered his State and all that went with it, his family and himself to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. With the Lord as the Supreme Sovereign, all the events and changes in the State of Travancore became directly linked to the Temple and were carried out in Sree Padmanabha Swamy's domain by His *Dasas* and in His name. So in wider vision, state-related matters too came within the realm of the Temple. Another aspect that is being highlighted with the inclusion of these details is the total involvement of the royal vassals in the combined aspects of Temple and State administration even at times when faced with stress.

From this mighty Sovereign to the present day, twelve rulers including three queens have made their historic contributions to this ancient Temple and to the State it dominated, moulding this time-span into a weighty record of imperishable imprints in its evolution. As such it would be only appropriate that this chapter deals with those rulers who swore allegiance to this abode of Divinity, as the ongoing modern history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

## **Sree Padmanabha Dasa Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma Kulasekhara Perumal, Maker of Modern Travancore**

**904 - 933 ME /1729 - 1758 AD**

Marthanda Varma the Great was born as the son of the Junior Rani of Attingal, who was adopted along with her sister and two brothers from Kola Swaroopam, and Kilimanoor Koil Thampuram. From the age of fourteen itself he displayed rare ability in administrative affairs and shrewd assessment of people and events which were to stand him in good stead all through his life. As such, his uncle the Maharaja, grew to depend more and more on him and entrusted him with responsibility and powers beyond his position, directing the prince to represent him on vital issues of negotiations as well. The Yuvaraja was adept at disguising himself and travelling within the State to detect insurgency or disloyalty which was considerable especially from the Pillamar of the Eight Houses or the *Ettu Veetil Pillamar*, and the *Yogathil Potties* who were their patrons. After he became King at the age of 24, the Maharaja was plunged into a torrid scene of open rebellion and secret plotting by enemies, internal and external, including the two Nair sons of the late Maharaja, who, for obvious reasons, strove to establish a patrilineal system, which would be to their great advantage. The formidable hostile forces who had already tasted the whiplash of Marthanda Varma's ire even before his formal assumption of total power, were not satisfied with anything less than his royal blood. It is in this background of turmoil and anarchy,



when disaster and death lurked at every corner for him, that this illustrious monarch started his unforgettable reign. He was a supreme devotee of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, mighty warrior and conqueror as well as an administrator par excellence. He goes down in history as the 'Maker of Modern Travancore' stretching from Paravoor in the north to Kanyakumari in the south including Kalakkad and Valliyoor areas in present day Tamil Nadu. His rule signalled the opening of a fresh chapter in the annals of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The present physical structure of the Temple itself is a magnificent monument of dedication of this most eminent monarch to his Lord and Master, Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Due to fermenting disloyalty, the political climate was explosive. The first major corrective action initiated by the Maharaja in this regard was to attack the nerve-centre of enmity – the Potties of the *Ettara Yogam* and the 'Pillamar of the Eight Houses' whose loyalty lay firmly entrenched with the Potties. Together these two powerful factions were bent upon establishing religious and political supremacy through the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by blatant misuse of power derived from the *Ettara Yogam*. To crush their misuse of authority was no simple matter and proved to be an uphill task aggravated by intermittent disasters. It was only in 912 ME/1737 AD that the King was finally able to strip the *Yogam* of its age-old power and vest in himself the full authority of control and administration in all Temple matters. From then onwards, the Swamiyar, the <sup>SENAP</sup> Potties and the Karanatta Kurup, together with who the King constituted the *Yogam*, became an assenting body which would at best advise. In theory the *Yogam* exists in the present period as well.

Marthanda Varma also abolished the influential hereditary posts of the Temple chroniclers instituted by King Udaya Marthanda Varma and replaced it with an alternative system of appointment. These chroniclers had full affinity with the Pillamar of Eight Houses and their allegiance was certainly suspect. Dereliction of duties and grave dishonesty in the administrative control of temple properties was of such an extent, coupled with syphoning of Temple monies required for the conduct of festivals etc., that their services were terminated and all such things were thenceforth directly managed by the King through his chosen agents.

It was the desire of Maharaja Marthanda Varma even before he ascended the Throne to renovate the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and in course of time he brought about an almost complete renovation in stages, a process which went on till his end. At that time this Temple bore the scars of the great fire of 861ME/1686AD. As the Thrippappoor Mooppan he was able to bestow thought and attention on this subject dear to his heart despite many other preoccupations.

On assuming the position of the Chiravayi Mooppan in 904 ME/1729 AD, Marthanda Varma immediately set the wheels of the renovation programme in motion.



It is very important to keep in mind that the Maharaja did not alter the original structures even in details or in the layout of the Temple but only repaired them. The innovation was the replacement of wood by granite as had long back been decided upon by his royal ancestor to prevent easy exposure to fire. There were no alterations to the old structures which were renovated as replicas of the original though beautiful additions were made. The reason for not going in for change would have been the strict and conservative adherence to the scrupulously followed Temple concept and culture. Only the Thiru Ampati Temple was left undisturbed because the previous fires had not touched it. Today it is the oldest part of the existing Temple complex.

The announcement of the decision to renovate the Temple was made shortly after he became King in May/June of that year on obtaining the *Anujna* from the Swamiyar and the other members of the *Yogam*, which was mandatory. The name of that Swamiyar has been entered in the scrolls as Padmanabhendra Yogishreshta or Padmanabhendra Saraswathi Pilarar Thiruvadi. On the 27th of the Malayalam month of *Kumbhom* 905 ME i.e. in March 1730 AD, the work commenced under the supervision and guidance of Kesavan Vishnu Thrathan Namboodiri of *Thycaud Illom* in Thiruvananthapuram. He was assisted by his son Sankaran and his pupil Raman. The Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy was shifted to the *Balalayam*. Inscriptions dealing with the renovation work are engraved on the base of the *Abhisravana Mandapam* and also on the two sides of the *Ottakkal Mandapam*.

Despite the fact that the State was in turmoil with civil wars and battles, Marthanda Varma would often leave the conduct of conquest to his nephew Rama Varma (Dharmaraja of later years) and to his very able *Dewan* (prime minister) Ramayyan and rush back to oversee the work in the Temple. Whatever might be the situation, his priorities ever rested with the Temple and he would personally be present for all important ceremonies conducted there. Not even the smallest detail escaped his attention. Only after the Battle of Kollam in 906 ME/1731 AD could the King concentrate fully on this large scale renovation.

Side by side, the King issued strict orders under three administrative heads, two of which had direct bearing on the Temple. The formidable task of augmentation of the State *Ayacut* after examining revenue records of about one hundred years was successfully carried out.<sup>185</sup> Secondly, a general Survey and Settlement of the State was ordered and demarcation of Temple properties executed bringing them under a separate account of holding termed *Sree Pandaravakai* and *Melkanganam*. This cumbersome task was entrusted to an officer of rare ability from Palliyadi by name Mallan Sankaran.

185. These records are preserved in the State Archives.



Thirdly, as is seen from the *Mathilakam* Records, Marthanda Varma ordered all chronicles or scrolls available in the Temple from 500 to 910 ME/1325 to 1735 AD to be carefully studied and a *Manual of Procedure* to be compiled,<sup>186</sup> which is preserved in the Temple to this day.

The main reclining figure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy was reconstructed with twelve thousand and eight *Salagramas* sacred to Vishnu and coated with a special composition known as *Katu-Sarkara Yogam* (This mixture is explained in the chapter *Abode of the Divine*). These stones were brought from the Gandaki river in Nepal on elephant's back. This took place on 3rd of *Painkuni* 908 ME/1733 AD. The expert maker of idols Balaranya Konideva and his disciples executed this wondrous image of God. (This goes on record in the TAS Volume, chapter I, page 42). There is a line of thinking which links the Nepal Royalty with the Cheras. It is said that after the coronation of Bhaskara Ravi one branch of the Cheras proceeded down to the south while the other went up north to Nepal. This concept of *Dasa* is seen in the relations of the Nepal King with his family Deity Sree Pashupathinath. Maybe it was his one-time Chera relationship that prompted the King to arrange the despatch of the *Salagramas*, which as per heresay, came as his submission to this Temple. It is stated that the *Salagramas* totalled 24,000 but only 12008 were utilised, the balance was put in a container and buried in the middle of the *Padma Teertham* as a reserve. This figure replaced the former Idol made of *Iluppa*<sup>187</sup> wood, which had sustained some damage in the great fire of 861 ME/1686 AD.

The fantastic *Ottakkal Mandapam* fashioned out of one huge granite stone slab cut out of a solid rock from a hill in the city itself was installed right in front of the sanctum.<sup>188</sup> The name of the hill 'Thirumala' is directly related to this incident as *Thiru* is a prefix added to denote respect, especially with reference to divinity or royalty, *Mala* means 'hill' and that and surrounding areas came to be named thus thereafter. The progress of this massive stone from the hill to the Temple features in two other chapters of this book viz. *Legends and Folklore* and *Abode of the Divine*. It took forty-one days and concerted efforts of a large task force to accomplish this feat. Inscriptions on either side of this *Mandapam* read 21st *Idavom* 906 ME/1731 AD as the date of completion of this masterpiece. Work on roofing with copper commenced after<sup>189</sup> raising a fund for the same.<sup>190</sup> Under the stewardship of Dewan Ramayyan arrangements for the large-scale free-feeding programme for Brahmins commenced.

---

186. *The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Records.*

187. *Bassia Langfolia* or *Mahua Tree* as is known in North India.

188. *Ottakkal Mandapam* – Platform fashioned out of a single stone.

189. *Mathilakam Records*, Churuna 24, Ola 75, year 907 ME/1732 AD.

190. *Mathilakam Records*, Churuna 13, Ola 84, year 907 ME/1732 AD.



The year 908 ME/1733 AD lists quite a few activities of a significant nature as far as Temple matters go. An interesting information is provided by V. Raghavan Nambiar in *Annals & Antiquities of Thiruvalla (Kerala Society Papers)*, which states that the Maharaja's agents brought expert granite masons from Thiruvalla to work in the Temple in co-ordination with the Tamil masons. Places have been provided for their family Deities like Kali, Bhairava etc. Many royal gifts were bestowed on them for their quality work. The *Padma Teertham* or *Darpa Kulam* of lauded sanctity attached to the Temple was widened and its shape re-defined running 83.3 feet east to west and 15.15 feet from north to south.<sup>191</sup> Granite steps were built all around the tank and broad pathways laid leading to the four entrances of the Temple. Orders were issued for the silver covering of the *Garuda Vahanam* (Vehicle fashioned in the form of the Garuda bird, attendant of Vishnu).<sup>192</sup> Maharaja Marthanda Varma was very strict about the regular submission of accounts of income and expenditure and directives were sent out for the same.<sup>193</sup> Another important event of 908 ME/1733 AD was that the *Kalasam* ceremony was performed by Tantri Tarananalloor Padmanabha Parameswaran.<sup>194</sup>

One unusual record of 911 ME/1736AD reveals the strict discipline enforced in the Temple. It states that anyone found chewing betel leaf inside the premises was to be checked and after informing the *Ettara Yogam* he was to be fined thirty six *fanams*.<sup>195</sup>

The year 912 ME/1737 AD saw the construction of a special Temple kitchen known as *Palppayasa Madhom* exclusively used for preparing a food offering of rice, sugar and milk for the Deity, known as *Palppayasam*.<sup>196</sup> One hundred and fifty litres of milk was daily used for this purpose and after the ritualistic offering, the entire quantity would be given away free. The Temple owned its own cows, sixty of them, (which were kept in what has today become the *Ramanamatham* wedding complex) from the monies got from the vanquished internal enemies. The *Bhadradeepappura* or the *Deepa Yaga Mandapam* was also completed in 912 ME/1737 AD<sup>197</sup> and an important ceremony known as *Bhadradeepam* was performed in the former place on a special *Salagrama*.<sup>198</sup>

191. 1. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 13, Ola 84, year 907 ME/1732 AD.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

192. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11, Ola 149, year 908 ME/1733 AD.

193. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 24, Ola 104, year 908 ME/1733 AD.

194. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2A, Ola 12, *Kalasam*, Purificatory ceremony.

195. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 8, Ola 93.

196. *Mathilakam Records*.

197. *Mathilakam Records* – They are separate structures within the Temple premises.

198. *Salagrama* is a stone sacred to Vishnu found on the bed of the Gandaki river in Nepal. It is widely used in Vaishnava worship and great sanctity and potency are attributed to it.



This was originally done to gain victory over the territory of Kayamkulam. Later on the purpose was range expanded so as to cover a whole range of needs like atonement for loss of life in warfare, prosperity of the land, protection and well-being of the people and so on.

The year 914 ME/1739 AD has many significant entries to its credit. Much was attempted and done well, during those twelve months. One of the triumphs of the Maharaja was the impressive *Sivelippura* (covered areas along which the Deities are ceremoniously taken out in procession), an addition to the Temple, started and completed in a record period of less than seven months.<sup>199</sup> Due to the rains, during one Temple festival which exposed the Deities to the elements, the Maharaja proclaimed that with God's blessings, by the next festival six months away, he would have a cover provided for this procession. He was able to do it. The immense *Sivelippura* with four corridors running round the entire length of the inner portions with beautifully and differently worked granite pillars, each having a *Deepalakshmi* (lady with a lamp in her cupped hands) was the result. This required the full-time labour of a formidable workforce of four thousand master craftsmen, six thousand labourers (from the Tamil-speaking regions) and a hundred elephants, to meet the deadline (more details in the chapter *Abode of the Divine*). Extremely vital was the great ceremony that took place in the Temple on the 9th Day of *Mithunam* (June/July) of this year (914 ME/1739 AD). Tantri Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Parameswaran conducted the reconsecration of the *Moola Vighram* (main idol) in the *Sreekovil* (sanctum).

All that is contained in the following few paragraphs too relate to the above mentioned year. A flag staff covered with gold was erected.<sup>200</sup> This was a religiously significant event and it was in place of the existing one made of the wood of the arecanut tree. The teak log required for it of given specifications as directed by the norms laid down, was brought by men of the Nair community all the way from Kakkacha Mala or Kakkati Mala, some thirty miles away without even once being lowered to the ground, which is a prerequisite, travelling a long way by sea, upto its destination inside the Temple. The copper *Padma Peetham* (base of the flag staff) was also constructed and the idol of Garuda fixed on top. The connected rites were conducted by Tantri Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Parameswaran.

---

199. 1. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

2. Dr. A. G. Menon – '*History of the Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758*'.

3. *Mathilakam Records*.

200. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2A, Ola 44. Date and year 9th of *Mithunam* 914 ME/1739 AD.



While no basic alteration was done to the Thiru Ampati shrine of Sree Krishna with its exquisite *Mandapam* (covered platform) rich in wood carving, certain necessary repairs were carried out.

A fund was created for offering *Pantheeradi Palppayasam* to the Perumal as an act of atonement for the war and for the misery caused during the annihilation of enemies.

The imposing *Natakashala Mukhappu* (hall for cultural performances and learned discourses and debates) was constructed at the eastern side of the main entrance to the Temple as the last addition of 914 ME. It is a spacious area with some beautiful carvings and a separate room in wood for the ladies of the Royal Family. The Temple had an impressive number of temple arts performed within its premises which numbered to ninety nine *Arangams* as they were called. (Refer chapter *Abode of the Divine*) The Maharaja extended considerable patronage to scholars and artists who flourished during his reign. Literary giants like Kunjan Nambiar, Ramapurathu Warriar etc. adorned his court. (What reads like a historic synonym of Sree Krishna and Kuchela, is the grant of fine housing and lands to Ramapurathu Warriar and Kunjan Nambiar, without their knowledge).

Earlier, the main *Belikkal* was in the open for a long period of time. The Maharaja had a roofing put up for it and also another extension for the flag staff. In the former area were consecrated two figures in granite of massive girth, of Hanuman in a posture of devotion and an *Ashtanaga* Garuda. Both these halls possess an abundance of sculptures which are glowing examples of craftsmanship (Refer chapter *Abode of the Divine*).

The *Nalambalam*, the immediate outer area coming after the *Cheruchuttu* (the inner regions), was reconstructed and as a new addition, the *Vilakku Madom* for fixing lamps, was made. The *Abhisravana Mandapam* in front of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* with its finely executed figures of the five Pandava Brothers, the adjacent *Alankara Mandapam* with the *Ashtadikpalakas* carved on the ceiling, as well as the *Thiruvolakka Mandapam* were all renovated. Funds were earmarked for erecting the *Bhadradeepa Mandapam* and the four *Unjal Mandapas* in the four corners outside the *Sivelippura*. The one in the south-east corner was reserved for the use of the dignitaries who could stand on it and witness the festival processions. The two carved granite pillars found near it were used to attach the scales for the performance of the offering known as<sup>201</sup> *Thulabharam* for the royalty. The *Bhadradeepa Pratishtha* was also conducted.<sup>202</sup> All this was in 919 ME/1744 AD. The remuneration for work done for devotion was either food or generous gifts.

201. This offering involves weighing of a person who is making the offering against the specified commodity he wishes to use for the purpose. This would then be distributed to Brahmins. In later times the proceeds of such commodities were deposited in the Temple treasury.

202. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 71, Olas 237 - 254.



The *Siveli* procession of the Gods was on elephant back as is commonly seen in other temples to this day. Due to the plotting of hostile forces, during one such procession the elephant was made to get out of hand in an attempt to create panic and harm the King and his men. From then elephants were replaced with vehicles in gold and silver, carried by Brahmin priests.

In the subsequent year the silver for the *Garuda Vahanam* was brought from Varkala.<sup>203</sup> In 921 ME/1746 AD an umbrella in silver was made for "Perumal Sree Padmanabha Perumal" and a food offering known as *Kilikinnam* instituted.<sup>204</sup>

An extremely important event took place in 922 ME/1747 AD when the *Murajapam* was started.<sup>205</sup> Namboodiries were got down from north Kerala for the same and the chanting of prayers was conducted in the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. It appears that this was the first time that a general prayer of thanksgiving was organised on such a large scale. Gold plates and gold pots were offered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by the *Yogams* of Thrissur and Thirunavaya Namboodiries in that year.<sup>206</sup> The *Vadhyans* or chiefs of both assemblies held important positions in the *Murajapam*. Two more entries of that year are noteworthy. Kathirkaman Ashari brought the *Simhasana Vahanam* (throne vehicle) from Padmanabhapuram and was rewarded four hundred *fanams*.<sup>207</sup> The Maharaja also saw to the construction of the outer granite wall as per specifications of Thyinol Namboodiri.<sup>208</sup>

The Travancore dynastic history abounds in adoptions. As this was the case even in the time of Marthanda Varma and as family continuation was imperative for the unbroken *Seva* to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the Maharaja took a vital step in this matter. Maybe he felt the urgency to lay down the norms, more than others, as he himself had the harrowing experience of struggle for the Throne. On the 11th of *Chithira*, (Malayalam month *Medom* corresponding to April) in the year 923 ME/1748 AD, the royal decree of adoption was promulgated by Maharaja Marthanda Varma in the presence of the Attingal Mootha Thampuran and the assembly, *Rajakaryam*.<sup>209</sup> This stated that, in the event of adoption, only unmarried *Thampuratties* viz. lady members of certain Kshatriya clans and not their male members be adopted as members of the<sup>210</sup> Travancore Royal House for continuation of the line.

203. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 27, Olas 56 - 58, year 920 ME/1745 AD.

204. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 78, Ola 113.

205. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 35, Ola 10.

206. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 78, Ola 112.

207. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 78, Ola 135.

208. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 30, Olas 120 - 130, year 922 ME/1747 AD.

209. 1. T.K. Velu Pillai – *Mathilakam Records - State Manual of Travancore*.

2. P. Shangoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

210. *Travancore Royal House or Thrippappoor Swaroopam*.



The King was never satisfied with his services to the Temple and was always eager to do more and even more. Rituals, offerings, constructions all took considerable strides during his glorious reign. Along with rituals and offerings he instituted endowments to enhance the income of the Temple. The *Alpashi* festival was reorganised on a grand scale. The *Thulapurusha Danam* was conducted by him too in 924 ME/1749 AD.<sup>211</sup> Also in that year a sweet food offering known as *Pantheeradi Palppayasam* was newly introduced.<sup>212</sup> Arrangements were made for the supply of necessary milk by procuring a satisfactory number of cows. They were stabled in Puthen Theruvu and Karamana Brahmin area.

The top of the old Sree Sastha shrine was renovated in the last month of 925 ME/1750 AD. A Brahmin artist by name Chalayil Kalahasthi drew the beautiful mural paintings (using natural dyes) on the walls of the shrine. An underground escape route was made opening on to the Shanghumughom beach. The famous *Perumthiru Amrithethu Puja*, which literally translates as the 'great royal feast' and in which an elaborate meal accompanied by five sweet offerings is submitted to the Deity, was re-instated by the King. Procedure for this *Puja* was laid down by King Veera Iravi Varma in 802 ME/1627 AD. This continues to be carried out twice a year after each *Samkramam* (solstice).

The year 925 ME/1750 AD is inscribed in letters of gold in the annals of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple because of the supreme significance of two historical events, *Lakshadeepam* and *Thrippati Danam*.<sup>213</sup> *Lakshadeepam* or one lakh of lamps is a festival when Sree Padmanabha Swamy is worshipped with that number of lamps and it takes place once in six years.

Once upon a time it was imperative for every *Kshatriya* king to conduct this festival. *Brahmanda Puranam* states that it took place once under the directions of King Kartaveeryarjuna of yore. King Marthanda Varma seems to be the next ruler on record who conducted this grand and lavish festival of lights,<sup>214</sup> at a cost of Rs. 2 lakhs. The *Murajapam* started a few years before was a thanksgiving on a large-scale for all the blessings received. The fabled *Lakshadeepam* festival taking place at the end of the 56 day-long period of prayers and rituals was introduced by the Maharaja for the first time on the advice of the religious authorities for ensuring peace and prosperity in the land. This *Lakshadeepam* took place on *Makaram* 1st, 925 ME/Jan 14 or 15th 1750 AD. Only Namboodiri Brahmins participated in the events. Four types

211. 1. P. Shangoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

2. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

212. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna. 30, Olas 35-42, year 924 ME/1749 AD.

213. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. P. Shangoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

3. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

214. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.



of *Japas* (prayers) were done. They were the *Murajapam* or recital of the three *Vedas* in a certain cyclic rotation and *Mantrajapam* or chanting of the mystic word groups—both in the morning, the *Sahasranamajapam* or repeating the thousand names of Vishnu at noon and *Jalajapam* or prayers in water in the evening in the *Padma Teertham*. One *Lakshadeepam* would take place after the performance of twelve *Bhadradeepams*, each one being done once in six months, taking a total of six years to complete the circle. The festival was in every way very elaborate, religiously, financially and administratively. To quote a small example, to light up all the one lakh lamps, twenty *paras* of oil were required. Maharaja Marthanda Varma had the fortune of conducting two *Lakshadeepams* during his life time. From 925 ME downwards this festival has been kept up in unbroken grandeur despite changes and constraints, the latest being the one in 1996 AD during the time of Maharaja Sree Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma.<sup>215</sup> The festival is not only a great spiritual event but also an unforgettable visual experience of the adoration of the Lord and for the well-being of the land and the people and continues to attract huge crowds from all over India (Refer chapter *Worship of the Celestials* for elaboration).

The Royal Family had always been famous for the abundance and lavish nature of the gifts and offerings the members poured at the feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy down the ages, from the hoary past to the pulsating present. These varied from small or routine offerings to ones of considerable value but there seems to be no offering in the known religious history of the world which merits any comparison in the sheer magnitude of emotional and devotional worth, to the<sup>216</sup> *Thrippati Danam* submitted by Sree Anizhom Thirunal Maharaja Marthanda Varma on the fifth day of the month of *Makaram* 925 ME/19th or 20th of January 1750 AD. Tradition had it all along, even before this Act, that the male members of the Royal Family, at the age of one, were laid on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* and surrendered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy as His own, gaining for them the supreme title of 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa.'<sup>217</sup> Those were individual submissions whereas this collective offering of the entire State by

215. The next *Lakshadeepam* festival is slated for 2002 AD, with the *Murajapam* commencing in 2001 AD.

216. 1. *Thrippati Danam* mean the *Danam* made on the holy step. This offering was done by the King along with other emblems of the royalty, when he, after certain rituals placed his royal and historic sword, the symbol of sovereign authority, on the step of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* connecting the sanctum and made over the entire State of Travancore to Perumal Sree Padmanabha Perumal as 'Sarva Samarpana Danam' - total gift submission (Anything placed on this *Mandapam* becomes Temple property).

2. *Mathilakam Records* - Churuna 21, Ola 89.

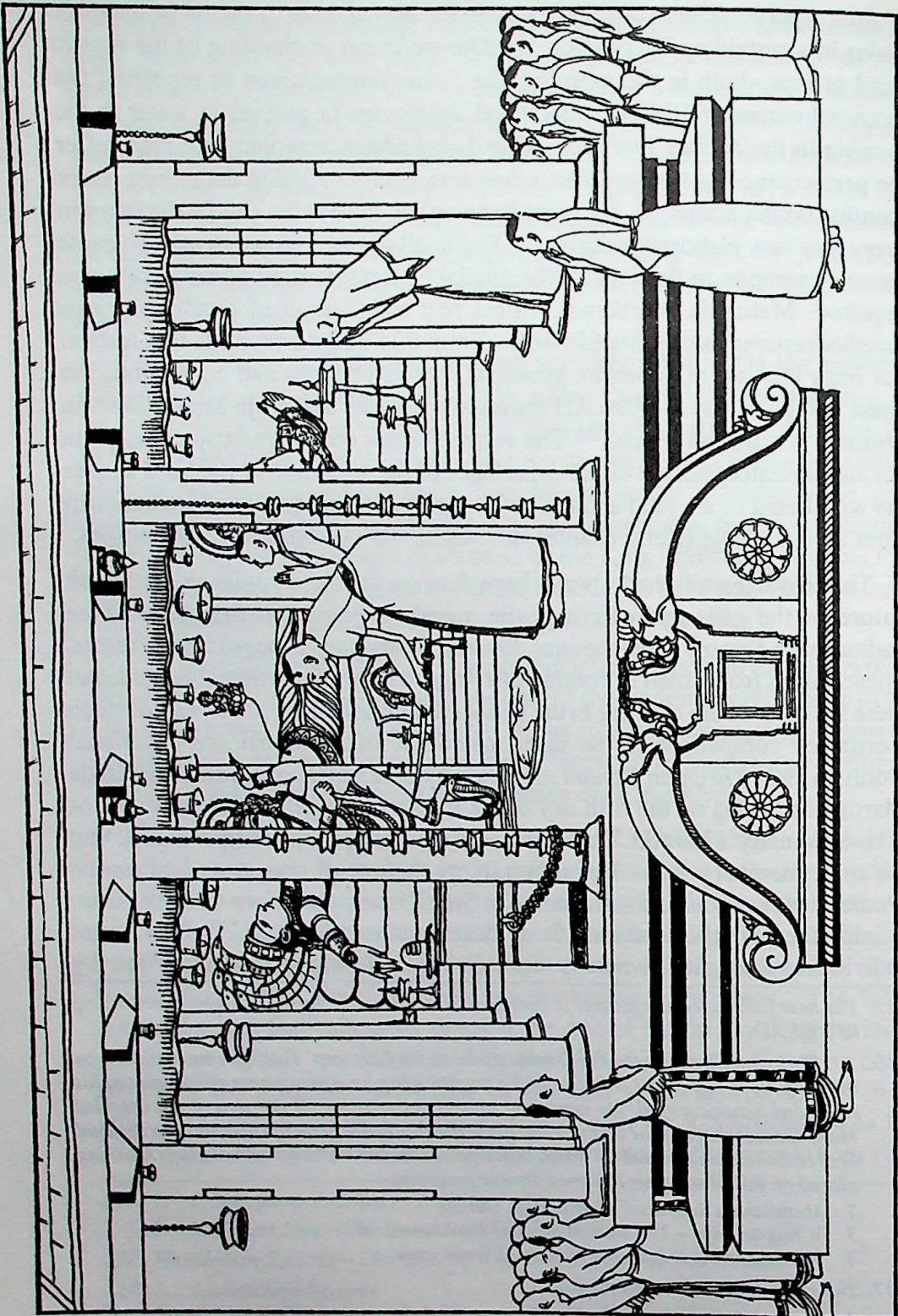
3. V. Nagam Aiya - *The State Manual of Travancore*.

4. P. Shangoonny Menon - *A History of Travancore*.

217. Two common misconceptions exist,

1. That the Sree Padmanabha Dasas came into being with the *Thrippati Danam* and  
2. That the title of Sree Padmanabha Dasa rests only with the seniormost male member of the family. As is clear from above both are incorrect.





*Thrippati Danam*



Marthanda Varma stands all by itself. Thenceforth he ruled the land as the *Dasa* (slave) of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in letter and spirit. It is worth remembering that thereafter the succeeding rulers of Travancore were not crowned with the ancient crown of Travancore and it was worn only once by them after performing the *Hiranyagarbham*, as the true monarch became Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The infusion of *Rajasam* or royal colouring in the worship of the Lord and the conception of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as the Supreme God as well as the Supreme *Perumal* (Sovereign) became far more emphasised in every way. *Thrippati Danam* was an epoch-making political event having great constitutional and legislative impact as well. This Deed of Dedication by which the Maharaja gifted his entire Kingdom, his family and himself to his adored Master, Sree Padmanabha Swamy, is so significant that it is dealt with under a separate heading which follows immediately wherein the actual text of the *Danam* and its translation are reproduced. It has been described by some evaluators and commentators as the most stupendous offering in recorded religious history.

### Thrippati Danam - 5th of Makaram 925-ME/1750 AD

Fifth *Makaram* 925 ME/19th or 20th January 1750 AD (Wednesday asterism *Revati*) stood witness to the act of a sublime dedication, the ultimate offering possible for a crowned head, carried out in supreme devotion – the *Thrippati Danam*.<sup>218</sup>

Like Arjuna before the Kurukshetra War and Emperor Ashoka after the Kalinga War, the futility of battles as a means to an end and the conscious feeling that the Travancore he created was built on a foundation of sacrifice of the liver and limbs of countless numbers who fell due to him and for him, deeply disturbed and distressed the Maharaja.<sup>219</sup> Along with the love which offered Marthanda Varma no satiation however much he might submit to his Lord, this trauma also activated him to surrender to God the Thiruvithamcoor (Travancore) stretching from Kanyakumari to Paravoor which he had won and made.

Before this dedication certain religious ceremonies like *Poorna Kalasa Homam*, invoking the Deity, and so on were performed, followed later by *Mahabhishekam*.<sup>220</sup> Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma arrived at the appointed time in the morning accompanied by all male and female members of his family, his trusted Dewan Ramayyan and other officials. In the presence

218. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. Dr. A. G. Menon – ‘History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.

3. *Many historical works (too many to be listed)*.

219. *Sree Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma Maharaja of Travancore*.

220. Dr. A.G. Menon – ‘History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.



of the Swamiyar, members of the *Yogam* and Brahmins, the Maharaja submitted to Sree Padmanabha *Prajapati* by Deed of Gift carrying his signature, his entire State of Travancore along with his total right on it thereof by placing the Crown, the royal umbrella, the twin white chauries (fans), the *Manikandha*; which were all symbols of royalty along with some *Thulasi* leaves on the *Mandapam*. Last but most significant, his famous sword, which had lashed its unleashed valour in countless battle fields, the unquestioned insignia of sovereign authority which the King valued the most, was also placed with utmost reverence by the Maharaja on the step of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* leading to the sanctum. Then the King received the sword back from the high priest and returned to the Palace after worship. His directive that any further conquest of territory brought under the rule of Travancore by his successors should also be surrendered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy was accepted and scrupulously adhered to with deep respect by the later generations. This historic Deed of Dedication drawn up in archaic Malayalam reads as follows:

## തൃപ്പടിദാനം

മതിലകം Record No. 22

### ശ്രീരാമചെയം

തൃപ്പാപ്പൂർ കീഴ്പ്പേരൂർ ശ്രീവീരപാല മാർത്താണ്ഡവർമ്മരായ തൃപ്പാപ്പൂർ മുത്ത തിരുവടി ഇരുന്നരുളിയേടത്തിങ്കൽ നിന്നും കല്പിച്ചു പെരുമാൾ ശ്രീ പണ്ടാരത്തി ലേക്കു ഇരാചിയം എഴുതി വച്ചു ചിറുവചു പാർപ്പണ ഓലക്കു എഴുതിന എതിരു.

൯൨൫-ാം മാണ്ടു തൈമാസം ൫ ഓം ൩ വിർചിക ചനി മീനം വീയാഴാം ചെന്ന കൊല്ലം തൊള്ളായിരത്തി ഇരുപത്തയ്യുമാണ്ടു മകരമാസം ൫ ഓം ൩ പുതനാഷയു പുറുവ പക്ഷത്തു ചത്തമിയക്കു ഇന്നാളാൽ എഴുതിയ ചറുവ ചുപ്പാർപ്പണ ഓലക്ക രണമാവിതു ശ്രീപണ്ടാരക്കാരിയാം ചെയിവർകളായ പാല മാർത്താണ്ഡ വർമ്മ രായ തിർപ്പാപ്പൂർ നിന്നും തങ്കൾക്കു ഒള്ള തോവാളകോട്ടെക്കു പടിഞ്ഞാറു കവ ണാറ്റിനു കിഴക്കുള്ള ഇരാചിയത്തിനു അകത്തുള്ളതു നാളതുവരെ നമക്കു അപകാ ശമായിട്ടു അനുപവിച്ചു വരുന്ന വള്ള കിരണിയങ്ങളും താനമാനങ്ങളും മറ്റും ഏപ്പേർപ്പെട്ടതും പെരുമാൾ ശ്രീ പണ്ടാരത്തിലേക്കു ചറുവചുപാർപ്പണമാക ആചെ നിരാർക്കമെ എഴുതി കൊടുത്താർ ശ്രീ പാണ്ഡാരക്കാരിയാം ചെയ്വാർകളായ പാല മാർത്താണ്ഡവർമ്മരായ തിർപ്പാപ്പൂർ മുപ്പിൽ നിന്നും ഇമ്മാർക്കമെ ഈ ചറുവ ചുപ്പാർപ്പണ ഓല കൈയെഴുതിയ മേലെഴുത്തു കണക്കു ചങ്കര കുമാരപട്ടർ എഴുത്തു.

The English translation is added below:

"We, Thrippappoor Keezhperur Veera Bala Marthanda Varma, Mootha Thiruvadi (Senior member) of Thrippappoor and Sree Pandarakaryam Cheyvarkal, have this day, Wednesday the 5th day of the month of Thai, the seventh day of the bright lunar fortnight with Saturn residing in the eighth sign and Jupiter in the twelfth, Kollam 925, transfer by absolute gift and dedication,



*to endure as long as the Sun and Moon shall last, all the lands and functions appertaining thereto together with all rights and dignities, positions of honour and all other possessions that we have been hitherto enjoying as of right within the territories between the Thovala Fort in the East and the Kavana River in the West, in favour of Perumal Sree Padmanabha Perumal. In token whereof we have this day executed this deed of absolute gift and dedication."*<sup>221</sup>

This Deed has been written in the hand of the *Melezhuthu Kanakkan* or head clerk, a Brahmin by name Shankara Kumara Pattan.

In the calendar of significant events of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple during the momentous reign of Marthanda Varma, the succeeding year of 926 ME/1751 AD also finds a place of its own. The *Painkuni Utsavam* which came six months after the *Alpashi Utsavam* was restarted. There is a fairly common misconception that this festival was a new event introduced by this King. Temple records themselves make mention of it long before Marthanda Varma the Great. Somewhere along the course of the history of this Temple it apparently fell into disuse and mention ceases to be made about it. Marthanda Varma revived it with one marked difference. While the *Alpashi* festival continued to be a festival of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the conduct of which rested with the Temple itself, the ten-day *Painkuni* assumed the character of a glorious personal offering made by the King. All sorts of cultural programmes and display of feats and skills became a feature of this festival. The gigantic figures in wood of the five Pandava brothers were erected facing the eastern entrance of the Temple and *Vela Kali*, a martial semi-dance form depicting the war between the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas, would be enacted daily at the steps of the main entrance.<sup>222</sup> The appearance of the Pandavas is an ongoing feature of this festival.

The Maharaja got the construction of the *Sreebeli Mandapam* completed in the same year, so also the *Shanghumughom Mandapam* on the sea shore to be used specifically for Temple functions especially in connection with the *Arat* of the Swamy. It continues to be in use for this purpose.

Another event of note that year was the performance of the *Hiranyagarbham* ceremony by the King. Tradition has it that when Cheraman Perumal gave his crown to the Venad King, he is believed to have instructed him to perform the *Hiranyagarbham* and *Thulapurusha Danam* before assuming the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'. In respectful obedience to this directive, a great majority

221. 1. Dr. A.G. Menon – History of 'Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

2. Mathilakam Records.

3. State Archives (where the original Ola is now preserved).

222. Refer to the Pancha Pandava Utsavam chapter Legends and Folklore. The hundred-odd participants for the Velakali were brought from Alleppey.



of the Travancore rulers are seen to have performed both these expensive offerings despite all other difficulties. Marthanda Varma also conducted the *Hiranyagarbham* and the *Thulapurusha Danam*, and assumed the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'.

Free food distribution was always an important activity of this Temple but in Marthanda Varma's time it assumed right royal proportions. A new *Oottupura* (cooking and dining area) was put up in 927 ME/1752 AD for this purpose. 92 *paras* of rice were cooked daily with 50 *paras* being set aside to feed Brahmins thrice a day.

The work on the gold covered *Vimanam* of the sanctum with the three gold *Stupas* (globular structures atop it) was well executed.<sup>223</sup>

Almost every year there is some entry of extra services rendered or offerings submitted to the Temple. So also in 928 ME/1753 AD a crown studded with corals was gifted to Sree Raghava Perumal in the separate Sree Rama Swamy shrine inside the inner enclosure<sup>224</sup> (*Cheruchuttu*).

The Maharaja was deeply religious by nature and was lavish in the offerings made to many other Temples though the maximum attention and fund diversion was to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. His name is closely associated with the histories of many a varied number of temples in erstwhile Travancore area and they are too many to be individually mentioned. One scroll in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple details the elaborate measures taken for conduct of <sup>225</sup> *Ganapathy Homam* and *Japa Dakshina* (financial compensation for religious practices like prayers) from Kanyakumari to Kumaranalloor (in central Travancore) during the year under survey.

Another example of the King's insatiable longing to affiliate everything with the Temple stands demonstrated in his administrative policy of Taluk formation. The first taluk so formed, Thiruvananthapuram, came into being in front of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* gaining for it the name *Thiruvananthapuram Mandapathuvathukkal* (i.e. in front of the *Mandapam* door-way). All subsequent taluks also came to be identified as *Mandapathuvathukkal*.

The driving desire to give more and more to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and contributing to religious activities only grew in the King with the passage of time. Sixteen great royal offerings are spelt out in the religious texts and are collectively termed *Shodasa Maha Danas*. Marthanda Varma had already performed two of the most complicated ones i.e. the *Thulapurusha*

223. *Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. III.*

224. *Mathilakam Records.*

225. *Ganapathy Homam - fire oblations done for the Elephant-God, Ganapathy. The details of this scroll were gathered from Mathilakam Records-Churuna 30, Ola 55.*



*Danam* and the *Hiranyagarbham* a few years earlier. The remaining fourteen were all done together in 928 ME/1753 AD in the Malayalam month of *Dhanu* corresponding to December at an estimated cost of rupees one lakh twenty one thousand.<sup>226</sup>

An extremely interesting event is described in the temple chronicles in the year 930 ME/1755 AD. The Maharaja despatched the *Mamankom* flag for the *Mamankom* at Thirunavaya to the *Zamorin* of Calicut from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, highlighting the position of the Temple on the religious map of Venad.<sup>227</sup> Another record on the same subject states that the *Mamankom* flags, two in number, were brought to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by Namboodiries from North Kerala and displayed them before the *Ettara Yogam*.<sup>228</sup> One flag had the representation of Sree Anantasayee and the other of Sree Narasimha Swamy. Perhaps the connection between this event and the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple would have been due to the fact that in bygone days the *Mamankom* which originated as a religious festival was presided over by the Chera Emperor, the Maharaja's ancestor, till the empire broke up.

The Maharaja desired a direct concrete connection with his God in the place where the Royal Family had been residing for a few centuries. So he had a third floor constructed called the *Upparikkam Malika* in his Palace in Kalkulam in present day Tamil Nadu and it was richly adorned with superb mural paintings. A fantastic cot made of sixty four medicinal herbs was fabricated and in the new room a perpetual lamp was kept lit.<sup>229</sup> This single room *Malika* (mansion) was dedicated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, this rare cot placed there for Him to rest and the whole place set apart as the abode of the Swamy there. The area till now known as Kalkulam and this Darpakulangara Palace where the King lived were both renamed after the royal Deity and from then on known as Padmanabhapuram and Padmanabhapuram Palace. This act of Marthanda Varma is one more example of his tremendous emotional involvement with his personal and family Deity.

Prompted by his keen sense of administrative control and caution the Maharaja had a complete list made out of the silver *Puja* utensils and ornaments in gold and gems offered by him.<sup>230</sup> In that year itself, among countless arrangements and additions made to the rituals which were already considerable, he ordered that *Panchagavyam* be offered daily and that *Navakam* be performed

226. P. Shangoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

227. The *Mamankom* was a very important annual event conducted on the banks of the *Bharathapuzha* in Thirunavaya under the overlordship of the *Zamorin* (King) of Calicut.

228. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 24, Ola 61, years 930 ME/1755 AD.

229. Since this cot was made for the Lord to rest, no one was allowed to sit on it or to touch it. This custom and the lighting of the perpetual lamp in that room continue.

230. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 123, Olas 243-244, year 930 ME/1755 AD.



every day.<sup>231</sup> Many of the golden pots used for storing holy water for the rituals seem to have been gifted by this King. The practice of offering pots made of gold annually on certain occasions was started by him and continued by all successive rulers.

In consultation with and on the directives of the Tarananalloor Tantries, the King got codified and regularised the rituals and other procedures of the Temple. He underlined the allocation of posts and duties most of which were hereditary in character even then, as he felt that this continuity would contribute to enhanced responsibility in the discharge of duties and increase the attachment to the Temple, of those employed by it. The ritual known as *Thirumudi Kalasam* concerning the Tantri and the King came into force during Marthanda Varma's rule. (See chapter *Worship of the Celestial*).

The Maharaja's greatest human strength and support for very many years was Dalava Ramayyan, his Minister, who had stood by him in every area of activity whether it related to the Temple, warfare or administration. In 931ME/1756 AD. the gravest personal misfortune of his life befell the Maharaja. Ramayyan fell seriously ill in Mavelikkara. The King despatched the Yuvaraja post-haste to the ailing minister and render all possible help to aid his recovery. Despite best efforts that stalwart passed away shortly. The Maharaja never really recovered from this tremendous blow and started to slowly pine away.

Thus the months moved slowly by and two years thence the Malayalam era 933ME/1753AD made its entry. Fate had earmarked it as a year of the utmost significance for the combined fortunes of the Temple and the Throne. Three events are recorded in red letters in the Temple manuals. Not satisfied with the submissions made to the Deity till then, the King offered one lakh bananas of the *Kadali* family, which was an offering of very lavish nature.<sup>232</sup> Not content with erecting the figures of the five Pandava Princes, the King had exhaustive directions listed for the decoration and ornamentation of these figures.<sup>233</sup> The new shrine for Sree Narasimha Swamy was completed and *Sree Narasimha Jayanti* was appropriately conducted.<sup>234</sup>

Now we come to the last magnificent construction visualised by the Maharaja in the Temple complex though he did not live to see it completed.<sup>235</sup> He had got the three smaller entrances in the south, west and north of the Temple

231. 1. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 95, Olas 171 - 175, year 930 ME/1755 AD.

2. *Panchagavya* – a preparation of the products of the cow, considered sacred.

3. *Navaka* – Rituals performed on nine pots of water which becomes most sanctified thereafter.

232. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 35, Olas 542 - 546.

233. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 35, Olas 527 - 536.

234. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 95, Olas 226 - 228.

235. 1. Dr. A. G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758'.

2. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

3. P. Shangoonny Menon – *A History of Travancore*.



finished and work on the imposing eastern tower or *Gopuram* with seven stories, was on the way. He visualised it to be tall enough and grand enough for the Gods who came to visit the Perumal, to rest and reside. The foundation for this structure had already been laid in the time of King Adithya Varma in 741ME/1565 AD. Marthanda Varma was able to complete five stories, the remaining two were executed in the time of his able successor and nephew Maharaja Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma.<sup>236</sup>

The momentous work undertaken by Marthanda Varma when so many other urgent things demanded his time and energy could have been accomplished only by divine motivation and the overwhelming love for his Lord, Whose grace alone had saved him repeatedly from the fangs of inevitable death. Folklore has it that the King, while sitting by himself on the Shanghumughom Beach in deep contemplation, received a directive from Sree Padmanabha Swamy and all his future actions came to be guided by it. As we travel further down the pages of the history of the Temple during those ages, we feel impelled to endorse this theory, for otherwise so much could not have been humanly attempted, let alone carried out in so short a span of time under such difficult circumstances.

Once again this aspect bears repetition — all the renovations so laboriously undertaken by the Maharaja strictly followed the pattern of the original structures. He too shared the conscientious objection of bygone generations to deviate from established forms and norms as far as possible, (a view upheld by the current generation of his successors also), and he was firm in the strict and perhaps conservative adherence to the scrupulously followed Temple customs and patterns. The new structures that came up were additions and not alterations of the old ones. He was fortunate in his choice of stalwarts like Ramayyan and Ayyappan Marthanda Pillai as his prime ministers who contributed greatly to the realisation of the dream dearest to his heart — the renovation and total upkeep of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

The demise of Ramayyan was in 931 ME/1756 AD, as mentioned earlier. This event shattered the lion heart of the royal master and his energy and strength began to ebb. Yet in the final year of life, in 933 ME/1758 AD, he contributed significantly to the Temple and they have been appended already in the previous pages 27th of *Mithunam* 933 ME,<sup>237</sup> corresponding to July 1758 AD dawned as a day of doom. The fifty three year old Maharaja was sinking and realising that his end was fast approaching, he called his beloved nephew and heir,

236. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. *The Travancore Directory - 1938*.

237. 1. V. Nagam Aiya — *The Stare Manual of Travancore*.

2. P. Shangoonny Menon — *A History of Travancore*.



Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma, to his side and gave him a few last instructions. The first two are relevant to the present context and are included here:

1. *That no deviation whatsoever should be made in regard to the dedication of the Kingdom to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and that all further territorial acquisitions should also be made over to Perumal Sree Padmanabha Perumal*
2. *That not a hair's breadth of alteration or deviation should be made in the established charities and the institutions connected with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.*

The deeply upset Yuvaraja gave his solemn assurance to his uncle that he would follow his directives in totality.

The Maharaja blessed him and in the midst of sorrowful relatives, officers and attendants, passed away quietly with the hallowed name of Sree Padmanabha Swamy on his lips.

The Temple records register that the ceremonial silk to be draped on the body of the Maharaja was sent from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple after being removed from the main Idol.<sup>238</sup>

The contributions, services and acts of depthless devotion rendered by Sree Padmanabha Dasa Marthanda Varma during his extremely eventful reign remain without a parallel and are inscribed in the annals of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in letters of gold. The call of his ancient blood and the clamour of love of his heart to his supreme Monarch bestowed on him God-given inspiration, strength and ability to achieve what would appear as an almost human impossibility. The grateful remembrances of time, undimmed by the passage of centuries, are standing ovations to one of the greatest Sovereigns who illumined the Throne of Venad.

**Sree Padmanabha Dasa Vanchi Pala Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma  
Kulasekhara Kiritapathi Manney Sultan Maharaja Rajah Rama Rajah  
Bahadur Shamsheer Jung Maharajah - Dharma Raja**

**933 - 973 ME/1758 - 1798 AD**

Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma was born as the son of the princess of Kolathunadu adopted into the Thrippappoor Swaroopam and the Kilimanoor Valia Koil Thampuram. The first *Mathilakam* Record available with regard to this illustrious personage aptly relates to a very vital honour the family has been continuing to cherish for centuries. In the Malayalam year 900 corresponding to the English year 1725, which was his first birth anniversary day, Karthika Thirunal was placed on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* and submitted

238. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 6, Olas 14 - 18 (Pattu & Katcha).*



to Sree Padmanabha Perumal with flowers, water and rice as 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa.'<sup>239</sup>

Sree Rama Varma was a rare God – given gift to his State, combining in one magnificent personality the qualities of a brilliant statesman, fearless warrior, astute administrator, eminent scholar and linguist, reputed author and patron of arts. Above all, like those before him he too was a committed devotee of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. His extreme compassion (which in later years won him the standing ovation of '*Dharmaraja*'), humility and gentleness of nature have been often lauded by many of his contemporaries and thereafter in recorded form. Trained by his outstandingly great uncle from his young days, he had gained thorough knowledge of his duties to the Temple and of the pitfalls of politics and the wages of war. As heir apparent too he had taken an active part in the policies of consolidation chalked out by Marthanda Varma, leading the armies to victory in the absence of his uncle, the King, especially when the latter had to rush back to Thiruvananthapuram to personally supervise the work going on in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Dewan Ramayyan's services were invaluable to him during those days of conquest also. Rama Varma's reign too was characterised by internal disquiet taking root in plotting and treason by attempted attacks from external forces. The threat from Mysore loomed large as Hyder Ali, once alone and twice followed by his son Tippu Sultan, advanced with armies to the borders of Travancore in the driving desire to make the land their own. (Tippu's second advance was the IIIrd Mysore war). As such though Sree Karthika Thirunal's aim was to consolidate the territorial gains made by Marthanda Varma and to confer on his subjects the benefits of a settled administration and the blessings of peace, the political atmosphere was fraught with tension and uncertainty. Despite heavy odds, as the mighty nephew of the mighty uncle, Maharaja Rama Varma blazed a trail of exceptional glory befitting the grand records left behind by his illustrious predecessors, preserving as sacred trust, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the ancient Throne of Travancore.

Strictly following the last directives of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, Rama Varma, who became King at the age of thirty three, continued his services to this Temple in the same spirit of devotion and dedication for Sree Padmanabha Swamy, which enveloped his great heart also.

Marthanda Varma's demise occurred before the majestic seven-storied Eastern *Gopuram* was completed. Five floors were ready and the balance of two were taken up and finished by Sree Karthika Thirunal. Raja Kesava Das, his Dewan ably assisted his royal master at every turn. Seven gold *Thazhikkakutams* were installed on top of the tower. One unusual feature of

239. 1 All the titles of office given above are common to the succeeding Maharajas and are not being repeated hereafter. The designation *Dharma Raja* is particular to this Maharaja only.

2. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2A, Ola 50.*



this abundantly carved structure is the boat-shaped construction crowning it. The King had it specially fashioned it thus to emphasise certain concepts. (They have been expanded in the chapter *Abode of the Divine*).

The extravaganza in stone – the fabulous *Kulasekhara Mandapam*, complete with the musical pillars, was the most significant addition made by Sree Karthika Thirunal to the Temple.<sup>240</sup> The work started in 933 ME/1758 AD and took many years to be completed.

The two *Utsavas* (festivals) of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple had become prominent occasions in the calendar of its events. During the ten-day festival, six different types of *Vahanas* (vehicles) are seen to have been in use. They had been fashioned originally during the reign of different rulers. In 935 ME/1760 AD the silver *Simhasana Vahanam* was brought from Padmanabhapuram under commands.<sup>241</sup> Likewise the gold *Indra Vahanam* was also made.<sup>242</sup>

According to tradition, Sree Karthika Thirunal performed the *Hiranyagarbham* and *Thulapurusha Danam* in the Malayalam year 936 ME or 1761 AD to assume the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'. He also commissioned the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* to commemorate this event. Perhaps it had been his intention to have it completed by then but a few additional years were required, despite Dewan Raja Kesava Das's untiring efforts in this regard.

Another religiously significant happening was the erection of the silver plated flag mast for the Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Swamy shrine on the 10th of *Meenom* 938 ME/1763 AD.<sup>243</sup> This too underlines the special, separate status of this particular shrine in the complex.

Sree Karthika Thirunal was very devoted to art and literature. Mahakavi Ulloor in *Kerala Sahithya Charithram* records the entry of *Mohini-attom*, a slow, languorous dance style special to Kerala, under the initiative of this Maharaja. People tend to overlook this vital aspect when they dwell on this subject due to the services rendered to popularise it by another great ruler a few generations hence. Karutheedapathu Chomathiri, a distinguished member of the King's court, was entrusted with the task of evolving this dance form. Mahakavi Ulloor goes on to state that three troupes from Mavelikkara, Kollam and Ambalappuzha were invited to present *Krishnan-attom* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple during the *Alpashi* festival of 939 ME/1764 AD.

240. 1. *Mathilakam Manual*.

2. V. Nagan: *Aiya – The State Manual of Travancore - Vol. 1*.

3. Dr. A.G. Menon – *History of 'Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'*.

241. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 11, Ola 150*.

242. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna not available*.

243. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 20, Ola 35*.



Sree Karthika Thirunal guarded and nurtured to the last, the faith reposed in him by his esteemed uncle in the unbroken devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. In strict obedience to the final directives of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, the territory newly acquired as per prior contract from Cochin, Mangattu Nadu, was made over to Sree Padmanabha Swamy as *Thrippati Danam* in 939 ME/1764 AD.<sup>244</sup>

In that year the construction of the gold and silver palanquins, the *Pallakku Vahanas*, for the Deities, was taken up.<sup>245</sup> This year also saw the performance of twelve out of the sixteen great offerings, *Shodasa Maha Danas* including *Gosahasra Danam* — gift of one thousand cows and excluding the *Hiranyagarbham* and *Thulapurusha Danam*, which had already been performed previously.<sup>246</sup> One more record appears in this year relating to the erection of an *Unjal Mandapam* (top covered, side open platform) in a significant spot.<sup>247</sup>

Three representative records of 940 ME/1765 AD feature below. The *Kulasekhara Mandapam*, famed far and wide for its living wonders in stone sculpture reached completion, though the King had assumed the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal' four years back. It is seen that stones were cut from a rock in Peroorkada for the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* in the previous year.<sup>248</sup> Stones were also brought for this construction from a place near Thiruvananthapuram called Kulasekharam. The King personally supervised this work. The name of the place bears significant links with the Kulasekhara Perumals. There was a Palace there where the King stayed to oversee the cutting and shifting of the required granite. (Vide for detailed description of this masterpiece in chapter *Abode of the Divine*).

A most significant code of procedure appears in this year in the documents.<sup>249</sup> During the *Painkuni* festival of the Temple, the Tantri, Tarananalloor Parameswaran Parameswaran Somathiri, passed away. It is recorded that the festival had to be suspended on what is held to be on the 4th day of the festival as all the Tarananalloor Tantries had death pollution. After the prescribed number of days for the pollution were over, the festival was resumed and *Arat* conducted on Ist of *Medom*. This underlines the position of the Tantri and the inevitability of his presence.

244. 1. *Temple Records and Mathilakam Manual*.

2. *P. Shangoonny Menon – A History of Travancore*.

3. *Dr. A. G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'*.

4. *V. Nagam Aiyar – The State Manual of Travancore*.

245. *Temple Records – Churuna 31, Ola 82 year 939 ME/1764 AD*.

246. *Temple Records – Churuna 31, Ols 498 and 499, year 939 ME/1764 AD*.

247. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 31, Ols 498 and 499, year 939 ME/1764 AD. (Significant spot is the Esana Moola)*.

248. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 28, Ols 126 - 130, year 939 ME/1764 AD*.

249. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna No. not available*.



After obtaining the consent of the *Yogam*, an *Anki* (removable covering) in gold for the reclining Ananta, the Serpent Lord, was commissioned.<sup>250</sup>

In 941 ME/1766 AD quite a number of important entries find their place in the manuals of the Temple. Paddy fields were assigned for the use of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>251</sup> An elephant was submitted to the Deity by the Perumpadappu Mooppan or ruler of Cochin.<sup>252</sup>

Orders were issued for making a gold Throne.<sup>253</sup> It is seen that the gold and silver *Pallakku Vahanas* (palanquin vehicles) arrived from Padmanabhapuram. One more important procedural aspect was defined in the Temple books after due consultations with the appropriate persons. This stated that in case of unconfirmed pollution, it need not be taken into account and *Pujas* should be continued as usual.<sup>254</sup>

There was great excitement all around when a crocodile was seen in the *Padma Teertham*. Arrangements were made to have it captured and removed.<sup>255</sup> The compensation paid to labourers is recorded in the Temple scrolls.

Though the previous records state that the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* was officially finished, work was done thereafter too. In 942 ME/1767 AD a particular pillar (അണിക്കരക്കുടിത്തൂണു) was to be sculpted.<sup>256</sup> Mootha Panikkar Thottathu Ashari, famed in this field, was got down for it.

In that year the *Anki* for Ananta was made and sanction was obtained from the *Yogam* for applying *Ashtabandham* on the hood before the *Anki* was placed.<sup>257</sup> In connection with this event, a big *Kalasam* (purificatory ritual) was conducted.

The royalty seemed to have a marked preference for rice and milk or rice and jaggery sweet offerings and many such offerings appear during the different reigns. Sree Karthika Thirunal also is found to have offered a milk and rice sweet food offering in the following year, i.e. in 943 ME/1768 AD. He submitted a fabulous gem-studded gold vessel of sizable proportions in which yet another famous food offering known as *Retnappayasam* (vessel studded with gems or *Retnam* in which this *Payasam Nivedyam* is offered) to the Lord.<sup>258</sup> This offering continues. The King's leaning towards the exotic is once again demonstrated

250. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 29, Ola 299.

251. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2, Olas 222-270.

252. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 3, Ola 27.

253. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 27, Ola 190.

254. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2, Ola 91, year 941 ME/1766 AD.

255. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 31, Ola 361, year 941 ME/1766 AD.

256. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 52, Ola 197.

257. 1. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 78, Ola 333, year 942 ME/1767 AD.

2. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2A, Ola 7, year 942/1766.

258. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11, Ola 233.



in the beautiful *Nagaswaram* (piped musical instrument) in silver that he got crafted he for the Temple.<sup>259</sup>

Once more there appears another record relating to the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* construction, dated 943 ME/1768 AD.<sup>260</sup> It details the employment given to the labourers of the Ezhava Community for bringing twenty-eight numbers of *Mandira Moorthy* pillars which had been made at Thirumala and the wages paid to them for their work. This shows that even after formal completion of the *Mandapam* in 940 ME/1765 AD work on it was continuing. It was in this year that Sree Karthika Thirunal was fortunate enough to be able to make another grand offering in obedience to his late uncle's directives. Honouring the previous agreement, Cochin ceded Alangad and Paravoor to Travancore in 943 ME/1768 AD.<sup>261</sup> They were submitted as *Thrippati Danam* to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by the Maharaja. Along with this Deed of Gift he gifted a three-row pearl necklace with a diamond pendant.

Again the royal line of Travancore faced the lack of female members in the family who were absolutely unavoidable for dynastic continuation.<sup>262</sup> As such, adoption became necessary. Sree Karthika Thirunal adopted two princesses (the two daughters of the elder princess Bharani Thirunal Parvathi Bayi whom destiny had earmarked as Queens of the future) from Kola Swaroopam residing in Mavelikkara Palace, in 946 ME/1789 AD, so that the family would continue the privileged service to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Though it has not been possible to obtain the exact date, the Maharaja had got two huge *Deepa Sthambhas* (brass lamps) with a number of tiers fashioned. They can be seen from a great distance when lit up and present a glorious visual display of light. They continue to be known as *Rama* and *Lakshmana* in local jargon. He also had a number of small copper lamps made for decorative purposes inside the Temple. Not satisfied with these gifts, the King is seen to have submitted one gold and one silver salver to the Perumal.

The *Murajapam* of 949 ME/1774 AD is being specially mentioned, as a ritual is recorded in the chronicles in this connection which seemingly has disappeared from the ritualistic codes of conduct. This is in itself most unusual as opposition to changes was strong in the rulers. The *Bhadradeepam* and *Murajapam* having been concluded, Goddess Lakshmi, consort of Sree Padmanabha Swamy seated on an ivory palanquin was ceremoniously escorted

259. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 24, Ola 142.

260. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 28, Olas 99 and 100, year 943ME/1768 AD.

261. 1. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

2. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 4.

262. Dr. V.S. Sharma – 'Thiruvithamcoor Rajavamsham'.



to the *Padma Teertham* for the ceremonial dip known as *Avabhrittha Snanam*.<sup>263</sup> In this scroll it is also inscribed that after returning to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, Sree Karthika Thirunal submitted a diamond and some money to the Lord. Like many of his family before him and after him, the desire to give more and more to the Temple was something which defied satiation.

In that year, a canal known even today as Kochar was constructed for free flow of water possibly from Chittar (a river) into *Bhadra Kulam* or *Padma Teertham*.<sup>264</sup> It is known as *Ananta Teertham* too and has other names also to its credit.

In 950 ME/1775 AD, Sree Karthika Thirunal instituted a massive programme of Brahmin feeding.<sup>265</sup> Provision was made for giving food to twelve thousand Brahmins a year — thousand per month — who were engaged for the *Sahasranamajapam* (recital of the thousand sacred names of Sree Maha Vishnu).

A special monthly offering on a Monday of each month was instituted for the *Kshetrapalan* (Deity guarding the Temple) in the month of *Vrischikom* (November/December) in the year 952 ME/1776 AD.<sup>266</sup> Other food offerings like special jaggery rice pudding in measurement of twelve (*Panthrandu Thulapayasam*) on every *Thiru Onam* day of the month and banana offerings were introduced.<sup>267</sup> The majestic Sree Hanuman Swamy has been worshipped as a potent deity on many counts. The Maharaja had a beaten-rice food offering, *Avil*, supposed to be Sree Hanuman's favourite, introduced.<sup>268</sup> In the following year, after obtaining the consent of the *Ettara Yogam*, he introduced another jaggery and rice sweet pudding.<sup>269</sup>

953 ME/1778 AD saw the construction of a *Nel-pura* for storing the paddy required for the Temple, inside the Temple premises.<sup>270</sup> Another action of proven worth was the careful detailing of a number of rituals and oblations.<sup>271</sup> Expenditure involved under each head thereof was written down.

Till now only the commanding Eastern entrance had granite steps leading upto it. Sree Karthika Thirunal had long granite steps laid at the Northern

263. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 75, Olas 62 - 88.

264. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 3, Olas 70-72.

265. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 28, Ola 110.

266. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11, Ola 234

267. *Thiru Onam is observed as the birth star of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in this Temple.*

268. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11, Ola 232.

269. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 3, Olas 74 and 75.

270. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 37, Ola 48.

271. 1. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 43, Olas 67 -129 - തിരുമുള, കോരൽ, തിരുമുള ഇടൽ (both connected with the festivals), പ്രസാദശുദ്ധി, വാസ്തുഹോമം, വാസ്തുക്കലശം, ചതുർശുദ്ധികലശം, ധാര, പ്രായശ്ചിത്തഹോമം, ശാന്തിഹോമം, തത്വഹോമം etc.

2. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 52, Olas 375 - 378.



entrance. (This was the entrance used by the Royal Family ladies also). It is seen from the entries that one hundred and forty five masons were engaged in this task. This work was carried out in 955 ME/1780 AD.

It has been part of the custom for the seniormost female member of the Thrippappoor Swaroopam — the Attingal Mootha Thampuran — to have reasonable power and authority vested in her and to augment the Temple treasury with donations and offerings. Her submissions are also listed off and on. In 957 ME/ 1782AD the Attingal Mootha Thampuran, also born under the asterism *Karthika*, ordered lands to be set apart for meeting the expenses for the conduct of *Usha Puja* and *Palppayasam* for Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Swamy.<sup>272</sup> One more sweet rice and jaggery offering famous as *Idichupizhinja Payasam* (ഇടിച്ച് പിഴിഞ്ഞ പായസം) was introduced, supported by a gift deed of land.

There is one Temple record which has some more information of a special nature. To fill the hole in the hood of Ananta made by a rat, river sand was brought from Karamana river by Brahmins in the year 960 ME/1785 AD.<sup>273</sup>

A storm broke out in all its ferocity in 961 ME/1787 AD. The gold flag mast of the Temple sustained damages because of the gales.<sup>274</sup> The *Padma Peetham* also sustained damages. By the next year (962 ME/1788 AD) a new flag staff made of teak wood from *Moonnamala* (മൂന്നാമല) was erected on the fortified brass base. A *Churuna* of the same year mentions another unusual incident. The then Periya Nambi had a fine imposed on him for the mistake he committed in looking back as he walked in the *Siveli* procession of the Gods.<sup>275</sup> Though there is a lighter element introduced in this record, it underlines the strict enforcement of discipline irrespective of the person or incident.

One of the lavish attractions other than the religious importance of the festival at the famous Siva temple of Ettumanoor in Central Travancore is the procession of the gold elephants well known as the seven and a half gold elephants or *Ezharapponnanas*, so labelled popularly as seven gold elephants are of one size and one, half the size of these seven. They were all submitted together to the Deity by Sree Karthika Thirunal who is seen to have a liking for unique and grand offerings. However it needs must be mentioned that this offering was originally made by Maharaja Marthanda Varma, who expired before it could be executed. Prior to these eight elephants being taken to Ettumanoor, the King had submitted a live elephant at the flag-mast of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and it was named Ananta Gopalan.<sup>276</sup> This event took place in 964 ME/1789 AD.

272. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 3, Olas 70 - 72.

273. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1030, Ola 146.

274. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2A, Ola 44.

275. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2A, Ola 47.

276. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 77, Ola 121.



The succeeding year 965 ME/1790 AD is politically and historically prominent.<sup>277</sup> Earlier Hyder Ali and his son Tippu Sultan of Mysore had dreams and designs on the fair land of Travancore and its riches. Tippu had advanced twice in the direction of Travancore but had to pay a high price for his ambitions. During his second advance, Tippu had openly declared his decision to tether his own horse at the gold flag - mast inside the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, since Sree Karthika Thirunal had outright rejected Tippu's conditions of peace which involved Travancore acknowledging the overlordship of Mysore and denying refuge to those who fled to this State to escape persecution by the Sultan. Rejecting Tippu's demand for return of refugees, the Maharaja's terse reply was "*It is not the tradition of Travancore to abandon those who seek asylum*". The ensuing events tell of the fall of Tippu and his retreat from the Nedumkotta fortification (central line of defence) which was fabricated under the King's orders. Sree Karthika Thirunal had also asked for Tippu's horse but insisted that it be brought to him along with its master. Some records of the Temple are proof that at many instances the King himself was at the front lines supervising the defence system; in so, certain decisions had to be taken in his absence by the *Yogam* but in consultation with his representative who was present. The desire of either ruler about the horse did not materialise but Tippu's flag, sword, shield and cap were brought by the jubilant Travancore Forces as trophies to the King. While the sword and the shield were returned following the request of the Nawab of the Carnatic who was a good friend and ally of Sree Karthika Thirunal, Tippu's dark green serrated flag, however, was taken out in triumph at the head of the flag, bearers during the *Arat* procession of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, as a symbol of victory of Travancore by Divine grace. A replica of this flag continues to accompany the *Arat* procession of the present time too. In this context it may be mentioned that it was the Nawab of the Carnatic who bestowed on Sree Karthika Thirunal the titles of *Manney Sultan*, *Bahadur Shamsher Jung* etc., which were retained by all succeeding monarchs.

Though not directly connected with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, it is of the utmost significance to note how this truly noble Hindu King came to be popularly referred to as 'Dharmaraja' which is how he is best known down through the ages. His land consequently became acclaimed as *Dharmarajyam* or *Ramarajyam* and its fame crossed State frontiers and spread all over India. Along with it, the sanctity and greatness of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, which now owned this territory, assumed new and vast dimensions. Reverting to how the King came to be honoured as 'Dharmaraja', though his

277. *All the history books of Travancore dealing with this period make mention at length about Tippu and the related events.*



deep love for charity and kindness of heart were accomplished facts, the *Dharma* and charity he showered in abundance on the refugees during Tippu's onslaught bears no known comparison anywhere. In the course of his invasions of North Malabar areas, Tippu embarked on a series of atrocities like burning down houses, molesting women of other religions, desecrating temples and churches and converting people to Islam by force under penalty of death. Many of the high-born Brahmin, Namboodiri and Kshatriya families who were the main targets of Tippu's hatred as well as Nairs and other Hindus fled to Travancore seeking asylum which neither the Zamorin of Calicut nor the Maharaja of Cochin was powerful enough to provide. Sree Karthika Thirunal welcomed them all with open arms, assured them full protection and living rights including gifts of land for those who wished to settle down. For some time the rulers of Cochin and Calicut too came to Travancore to escape the cruel clutches of Tippu. It is on record that the famed Idol of Sree Guruvayoorappan from the Sree Krishna Temple at Guruvayoor was brought by the priest to Travancore where it was ceremoniously received and worshipped, at first in Ambalappuzha and for a short time in the shrine of the Royal House of Mavelikkara. After the menace of Tippu was removed, the Idol was taken back to the original abode in Guruvayoor. Rama Varma's acts of charity to these distressed hordes of people was of such magnitude that they earned him the title 'Dharmaraja', Sovereign of the land of Charity.

Many of the well known aristocratic Kshatriya families especially hailing from the central Travancore like Thiruvalla, Haripad, Changanacherry, etc. are descendants of the Kshatriya nobles who came to Travancore during those days. The influx of Namboodiries from great families and their religious contributions thereafter enhanced the spiritual wealth of Travancore.

Till the time of Sree Karthika Thirunal many great Vedic sacrifices were confined to the territories of Cochin and Calicut and were conducted under the authority of the rulers of those lands, as the lands lying to the South were considered unsuitable for such oblations. Dharmaraja was determined to change this state of affairs. After due consultations with the lawmakers and the learned among the Namboodiries, their *Vaideekans*, for the purpose of the *Yagas*, the annexation of Alangad to Travancore as per contract with Cochin, took place. His desire to have these supreme sacrifices performed on the soil over which Sree Padmanabha Swamy exerted complete overlordship bore fruit, when he gifted villages north of Periyar river free of tax as per one collective deed of gift to eighteen Namboodiri families hailing from Shukapuram village, ten from Perumanom Village and eight from Irinjalakkuta Village.<sup>278</sup> From then

278. Reference: *Sree Kakkad Parameswaran Namboodiri - high priest of Sree Krishna Temple, Guruvayoor, hailing from the Kakkad Illom (or House) of historic fame at Shukapuram Village. The Kakkad family was one among the eighteen Illoms from this village to be settled in Travancore by Dharmaraja.*



on such lauded rituals came to be performed in Travancore soil also, to increase its inherent sanctity. This was done in 947 ME/1772 AD quite some time prior to the invasion of Tippu. More and more families of Namboodiries fled their native land and joined their relatives who had already been settled inside Travancore borders by the king. Descendants of many of these illustrious families still carry with them the emotional scars of those days of terror.

To commemorate the victory over Tippu Sultan, Dharmaraja submitted a silk flag along with a mast to "*Perumal Sree Padmanabha Perumal*."<sup>279</sup> It is not clear if it was the same flag which was captured from Tippu's standard bearer but that seems unlikely as that flag would not have been permitted inside the Temple. Perhaps it was a replica of the same. This was also in the year 965 ME/1790 AD.

The Maharaja appointed *Anchal* runners (postal runners) for purposes connected with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Palace.

In 966 ME/1791 AD, the *Indra Vahanam* used for the festival procession inside the Temple was carved in jackwood and covered with gold for the use of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.<sup>280</sup>

A very great service was done to the Temple administration under directives issued by the King. The Temple *Granthavari* (records in *Granthi* script) was written down and wages paid for the same.<sup>281</sup>

The King also carried out the total completion of the unfinished aspects relating to the structural construction of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which his late illustrious uncle had been unable to do. As a result the succeeding rulers had to carry out only routine repair work and preservation. It was only after centuries had passed by that any such allied activity was undertaken in a substantial manner, which was during the time of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma.

Keenly interested in all art forms, especially *Kathakali*, he was himself a reputed composer of *Kathakali* literature. He founded the *Kottaram* (Palace) *Kathakali Yogam* and, in association with Kapplingadu Namboodiri, introduced a new style of presentation in *Kathakali* known as the *Kapplingadu* or *Thekkan* 'Southern School of Kathakali'. The ten days *Kathakali* performed during the festival in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple adheres to this school. Famed performances like *Nalacharitham Atta Katha* by Unnayi Warriar, who enjoyed

279. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 16, Olas 129 - 207.

280. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 128, Ola 76.

281. 1. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 47, Ola 156.

2. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 58, Olas 133 - 199, 230 - 280 etc.



the King's unstinted patronage, were for the first time staged in this Temple. The Royal Court was graced by an impressive array of luminaries of scholarly, artistic and literary excellence including Kunjan Nambiar, Manorama Thampuratty and scholars from other states—the list was formidable. The King himself is the author of *Bala Rama Bharatham* a treatise on *Natya Sastrom* famous all over India. Other than Bharatha Muni's work on this subject, there is no comprehensive treatise on dance. Artists of repute representing different art forms from within and outside the State of Travancore found a platform to exhibit their talents in the Temple and in the Court. This is supported by various records available in the Temple.

It seems incredible how this King succeeded in serving his State and the people in an all — comprehensive manner and accomplished so much without neglecting any aspect of holistic development. The fact that at the same time he had to fight for peace and face threats to life cannot be consigned to oblivion. Some of the outstanding events of his reign like the Suchindrom Treaty with Cochin, other political treaties of great significance as well as acts like the establishment of the Alleppey port, minting of new coins, irrigation works and so on do not fall within the integral history of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and as such are not being elaborated. Suffice it to state that under Dharmaraja, Travancore was upheld as the 'Model State' of India. His name and fame had spread all over India and abroad. A letter of appreciation from the Pope is one example in point.<sup>282</sup> Dharmaraja may be pronounced without hesitation as the ruler who approached nearest to the Hindu ideal of a good and great king. He also fits in with Plato's concept of a true sovereign.

Dharmaraja was the ruler to have reigned for the longest span of time and the people in affection gave him one more name *Kezhavan Raja* or 'Old King'. At the age of seventy four, in 973 ME/1798 AD, after a long and memorable action-packed reign, this noble monarch passed away.<sup>283</sup> All honours due to him from the Temple were accorded to him as of right. His demise was mourned deeply by rich and poor, high and low alike and the entire State went into voluntary mourning.

Sree Karthika Thirunal had cherished close to his heart to the last, the faith reposed in him by his late uncle Marthanda Varma in the continued devotion and dedication to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Even the march of the succeeding seasons has been unable to dim the brilliance that is Dharmaraja who translated his greatness into deeds of glory in the name of his Divine and Royal Master, Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

282. 1. P. Shangoonny Menon — *A History of Travancore*.  
2. V. Nagam Aiyar — *The State Manual of Travancore*.

283. Same as Note 280 and in all historic works relating to Modern Travancore History.



## Sree Padmanabha Dasa Maharaja Avittom Thirunal Bala Rama Varma 973 - 986 ME/1798 - 1810 AD

Bala Rama Varma succeeded his uncle Dharmaraja of unquestioned fame at the young age of sixteen. He was deeply religious but mild by disposition and was considered weak. This, coupled with the inexperience of his age and the unfortunate selection of his three chief officers including Jayanthan Sankaran Namboodiri who were traitors to the cause of Travancore, ushered in much confusion and chaos. Their misdoings thereafter created a lot of uproar and turmoil within the State paving the way for the rise of Velu Thampi, *Dewan* of the near future. On assuming office, Velu Thampi took many bold steps to enhance the economic and commercial prosperity of the State and for toning up the administration, presenting an incorruptible Governmental system. The Alleppey port and the bazaars of Chalai and Changanacherry flourished during this period and the latter was set up by him. The Chalai Bazaar, contrary to popular belief, existed much before this time. It is there during the rule of Sree Udaya Marthanda Varma in the year 693 ME/1518 AD.<sup>284</sup> They generated much income to the State treasury. Velu Thampi Dalava is remembered in history for his scrupulous honesty, efficiency and uncompromising nature.

Despite the advantages gained, adversity and disquiet kept on erupting but the cyclic changes of fortune were not allowed to hinder the functioning of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Offerings and services continued. A major offering received from outside the Royal Family during this period was from Dalava Velu Thampi himself. The records state that Thalakkulathu Thampi Velayudhan Chempakaraman, *Valia Sarvathikaryam* (Big Dewanji) submitted a heavy seven-tiered gold vessel used as *Deeparadhana Thattu* in 977 ME/1802 AD.<sup>285</sup> All auspicious days were kept up like the annual<sup>286</sup> *Swargavathil Ekadesi* (very important to Vaishnavites) and the expenses carefully recorded. The *Bhadradeepa Pratishta* in the Temple was duly carried out in 980 ME/1805 AD.<sup>287</sup> Maharaja Bala Rama Varma directed that the large mural painting of *Ananta Padmanabha Swamy* on the western side of *Chuttambalam* be re-touched and clearly defined by the well-known Brahmin artist named Chalayil Kalahasthi.<sup>288</sup> Since this same artist executed the murals on the walls of the Sree Sastha shrine in the Temple complex, it can be reasonably assumed that this was also during the reign of this King (or near that period). A sweet milk and rice offering known as *Athazha Palppayasam* (അത്താഴപ്പായസം പായസം) was

284. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 1656, Olas 76 and 77.

285. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 16, Olas 236 - 238. *Deeparadhana Thattu* - Utensil used for oblation with fire.

286. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 5, Olas 299 - 307, year 979 ME/1804 AD.

287. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2A, Ola 36.

288. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 13, Olas 93 and 94.



instituted at the shrine of Sree Krishna in the Thiru Ampati.<sup>289</sup> Both these were in 980 ME/1805 AD.

In the succeeding year of 981 ME/1806 AD the King introduced *Muzhukkappu* on the idol of Sree Hanuman Swamy inside the Sree Rama Swamy shrine along with other offerings.<sup>290</sup> It is done with prescribed materials like butter, sandalwood paste etc. Bala Rama Varma's attention reverted to all aspects connected with the Temple. In this same year, after careful scrutiny he had the procedure laid down if the Nambi passes away while in office.<sup>291</sup> Old records as ready reference for the same were available.

The repairs of the Kshetrapala's shrine was taken up after obtaining necessary *Anujna* from the *Ettara Yogam*, in 982 ME/1807 AD.<sup>292</sup>

The year 984 ME/1808 AD bore witness to two unusual and interconnected events. The Oracle in the Sree Vettakkorumakan Temple (വേട്ടക്കൊരുമകൻ കോവിൽ), closely linked with the ruling Royal Family, predicted disaster to the State. Following this prediction, on the 10th of *Dhanu* that year, the chronicles of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple report a startling and frightening happening. That night at ten the Temple bells started to ring of their own accord and a fearsome roar welled up from inside.<sup>293</sup> The staff at the spot fled hither and thither in panic. Coming close on the heels of the prediction of the Oracle, it emphasised the dread of disaster as a specific ill omen during what was considered the dark period in Travancore history by some evaluators. These incidents made the King cling more firmly to his Deity. All through his tension-filled reign of many upheavals, Bala Rama Varma remained unflinching and strong in his devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. He would agree to no compromise in the discharge of his duties to the Temple. This determination is well illustrated by the following incident.

The State treasury presented a fairly dismal picture. The *Murajapam* and the *Lakshadeepam* festival were approaching. Dewan Ummini Thampi joined hands with the British Resident to exert continued pressure on the King not to conduct the festivals which involved heavy expenditure and to divert that amount to other pressing commitments. Though greatly taxed, the Maharaja held his ground and refused even to consider any deviation from the sacred trust invested in him by illustrious inheritance, despite the serious consequences he would have invited on himself for displeasing the British authority. His strength of

289. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 94, Ola 165.

290. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 45, Ola 45.

291. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 89, Ols 85, 86, year 981 ME/1806 AD.

292. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 12, Ols 1 - 37.

293. 1. *Mathilakam Records*.

2. *State Archives*.



conviction finally won the day and the festival took place. In an intimation in writing, the Resident conveyed his altered sentiments on the issue by stating that "*The time-honoured tradition should not be interfered with*": The King also performed without fail the *Hiranyagarbham* and the *Thulapurusha Danam* and assumed the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal' within the short period of time allotted to him by destiny.

Adherence to tradition obtained for Bala Rama Varma too, his share of penalties for lapses for which he was not responsible. This had been the mode of operation from long back and is seen in the present day also. To illustrate this point there is a chronicle of 986 ME/1811 AD which speaks about the penalty paid by the King for the sin accidentally committed by the Periya Nambi when the Sree Hanuman Idol got partially dislodged when his foot hit against the Idol inadvertently.<sup>294</sup> Purification was conducted and the King had to offer gold by way of fine.

The Maharaja was strict in adopting corrective action for lapses in Temple matters. For instance, the *Arat* procession of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in the year 985 ME/1810 AD arrived late at the Shanghumughom Beach.<sup>295</sup> A very serious view was taken and action was adopted without delay on the concerned erring staff. They had to offer to the Deity, a jaggery and rice sweet offering in a proportion of twelve which weighs 12 units of weight called *Thulam* and which, therefore, is known as *Panthrandu Thula Payasam*. (പന്ത്രണ്ടു തുലാ പായസം)

In the prime of his youth, at twenty nine years of age, at midnight, Maharaja Bala Rama Varma breathed his last. Whatever be the political assessment and historical evaluation of this much troubled King, his staunch devotion to his Deity remains beyond question.

### **Sree Padmanabha Sevini Vanchi Dharma Vardhini Rajarajeswari Ayillyom Thirunal Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi**

**986 - 990 ME/1811 - 1814 AD**

Maharaja Karthika Thirunal, faced with the problem of having no female in the family for continuation, adopted in the year 964 ME/1789 AD two princesses, Parvathi Bayi (Bharani Thirunal) and Uma Bayi (Uthrom Thirunal) from Kola Swaroopam, who were at that time residing in the Mavelikkara Palace. They were to be the *Attingal Mootha Thampuran* and *Attingal Elaya Thampuran* as was prescribed by tradition. The assumption of Gouri Lakshmi Bayi the elder daughter of the senior princess, as the *Mootha Thampuran* is noted down in the Temple records. This is yet another proof that all domestic

294. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 3, Ola 4.*

295. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 78, Olas 23 - 49.*



and political events of the Thrippappoor Swaroopam automatically found a place in the Temple manuals. The names of the two sisters have been deeply etched in letters of gold in the pages of the proud history of Travancore.

The *Churunas* reveal that this princess's marriage was conducted with Changanacherry Koil Thampuran in Attingal, that before and after the event she worshipped at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and offered *Kanikka* (money) as submission.<sup>296</sup> This event took place in 976 ME/ 1801 AD.

Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi ascended the Throne in 986 ME/1811 AD at the young age of twenty following the unexpected demise of her uncle Maharaja Bala Rama Varma. There was a serious dispute on the matter of accession with a claim put forth by a relative of the Rani, Kerala Varma of Mavelikkara Palace, who was a great favourite of the late ruler and was styled as the Elayaraja during Bala Rama Varma's time.<sup>297</sup> Initially the *Ettara Yogam* swayed towards Sree Vishaghom Thirunal, Kerala Varma's side, but after consulting the *Mathilakam* Records with special reference to the scroll of 923 ME/1748 AD which clearly defined the directives of adoption and accession as promulgated in a royal decree by Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, Kerala Varma's claim stood dismissed. In the presence of an esteemed gathering, the *Ettara Yogam* approved the Rani's claim in which she stated that while she herself had no ambitions to the Throne of Travancore, as long as even one infant of the Thrippappoor Swaroopam existed, irrespective of the sex, the honour and privilege of serving Sree Padmanabha Swamy should not be denied to that individual and should not be invested elsewhere. After consulting the *Yogam* and the Tarananalloor Tantries and depending heavily on the Temple records, Col. Monroe, representing the British Government supported, her case. *Mathilakam* Records of the year in question give a detailed account of the ceremony of accession. Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, Mootha Thampuran of Attingal, assumed the Chiravayi Mooppu as the Ruler of Travancore, after receiving the Sword of Sovereignty at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple on performing the *Pati* and *Patiyetam* ceremony there. The Temple *Churunas* render an extensive descriptive account of the proceedings. The Rani submitted an elephant and many other offerings in money and kind. There is a record stating that she had the *Perumthiru Amrithethu Puja* conducted soon after.<sup>298</sup> The Queen also submitted many ornaments to the Lord.

It had been customary for the Mootha Thampuran of Attingal to offer gifts to the Deities when the *Palli Vetta* procession passed by before the Thevaratu Koyikkal, which was used as official residence by her when in Thiruvananthapuram. The procession would stop there for *Deeparadhana* to

296. *Mathilakam Records* – *Churuna* 77, *Olas* 225-226 and *Churuna* 83, *Olas* 35-56.

297. *Whole para* – *Mathilakam Records* - *Churuna* 77, *Olas* 237-241.

298. *Mathilakam Records* – *Churuna* 95, *Olas* 36-42.



be performed. Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, in her dual role as Sovereign of Travancore and Mootha Thampuran of Attingal, discharged her duties in the latter capacity when the procession reached the Palace frontage and submitted a necklace and the usual amount of money to the Deities. The Temple records give the year as 986 ME/ 1811 AD and the festival as the *Painkuni Utsavam*.<sup>299</sup>

Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi seems to be the only Queen to have ruled Travancore in her own right and not as a regent. Despite her youth and total inexperience, this accomplished, beautiful Queen was able within a very brief span of four years to leave the hallmark of peace and prosperity on the scarred and bruised State she had all of a sudden inherited.

In the opening words of her address on assuming this exalted rank, she conveyed the following sentiments “..... *had it not been for the will of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, my uncle would have held the sceptre for a greater length of time ..... but since it has been the will and command of my household Deity Sree Padmanabha Swamy, I am ready to obey*”.<sup>300 & 301</sup> Obey she did with such marked excellence that it is no exaggeration to state that she (and her younger sister later on) literally qualified for the titles affixed to the name.

Sweeping enactments like abolition of slavery and burdensome taxes, recasting the legal system based on the *Satta Variyola* (സത്തവരിയോല), which still holds good, reforming the army and once again bringing the State treasury to a happy surplus — all these read like a remarkable success story.

The Rani's interest in religious matters and in the protection and preservation of temples never waned. Rules were framed by which *Devaswoms* (wealth of any kind pertaining to temples and their properties) were brought under the Government under the direct supervision of the queen. Large and liberal scales of allowances were granted to the Brahmins performing religious ceremonies in temples. The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple featured prominently in this.

Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi was lavish in the offerings made on many counts to the Temple. A good many of them were for the boon of a son. The year 987 ME/1812 AD lists many gifts made by her whether it be for some specific purpose, such as cure of illness or motivated by sheer desire to give. She is seen to have conducted large-scale offerings like lighting of all the lamps, arranging for the procession of the Deities on the *Ananta Vahanam* inside the Temple premises etc.

299. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna number not obtained, *Olas* 165-168.

300. P. Shangoonny Menon – ‘A History of Travancore’.

301. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 95, *Olas* 302 - 305.



A scroll of 988 ME/1813 AD details the fixing of the auspicious time for hoisting of the Temple flag marking the start of the festival. The *Anujna* from the *Ettara Yogam* was essential.<sup>302</sup> The Queen is seen to have gone on a pilgrimage to other great temples like the Suchindrom Temple, which came within her domain, after submitting money at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.<sup>303</sup> That year itself the Queen shifted from the Thevaratu Koyikkal Palace to the Perumal Palace reserved possibly for the Sovereigns.<sup>304</sup> The name of this Palace invites attention as it could mean either the Palace of the ruler or the Palace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, who was commonly referred to as "Perumal" and to whom the Sovereign too belonged.

Gouri Lakshmi Bayi appears to have been the first Queen to have taken part in all the functions of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple including the *Arat* procession in her own right as ruler of the land. It is said that this gracious Rani walked for the *Arat*, procession, the sacred sword of her ancestors held in her hand, surrounded by attendants holding big cadjan leaf umbrellas sideways which obscured her from outside view, as it was not customary for the royal ladies to appear in public.

988 ME/1813 AD was a very important one in the personal life of the Queen and in the art-related supremacy the State as it was in that year, in the month of *Medom* (April/May) under the asterism *Swathi* that a son and heir to the Throne, Rama Varma, was born. The Temple *Churunas* of the next year 989 ME/1814 AD describe the first birthday of this baby Prince and of his being dedicated as 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa'. This ceremony termed *Atimayital* (അടിയടൽ), which in this family is the prerogative of the mother, was carried out on her behalf by her sister, who was a child herself, due to some personal inconvenience, it was not possible for the Queen to go to the Temple. Many offerings and ceremonies like *Kalabha Kalasam* are entered in the manuals in connection with this great event of joy.<sup>305</sup>

After a brief but brilliant reign of four years, following an illness of short duration, this well beloved Queen passed away in the prime of her youth much to the great sorrow of her subjects. She entrusted the upbringing of her three small children and her young sister to her husband Changanacherry Koil Thampuran and breathed her last, leaving all at the feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Her mortal remains were covered with the gold lace worked silk, which had been draped on the main reclining form of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in the sanctum, as the last and most sacred decoration of honour.<sup>306</sup>

302. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 80, Ola 195.

303. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 83, Ola 131.

304. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 95, Olas 302 - 305.

305. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 95, Olas 104 - 112.

306. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 6, Olas 49 - 53.



## Sree Padmanabha Sevini Uthrittathi Thirunal Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi

990 - 1004 ME/1814 - 1829 AD

At the tender age of thirteen, by the repetition of the unexpected course of fate, Gouri Parvathi Bayi was faced with the task of becoming Queen of the ancient and fabled land of Venad.<sup>307</sup> When her much lamented elder sister passed away leaving behind three small children, a daughter Rugmini Bayi, a son and heir Rama Varma (Sree Swathi Thirunal of lasting fame) and another baby son Marthanda Varma (Uthrom Thirunal), as the senior most member of the dynasty, Gouri Parvathi Bayi ascended the throne as the child Queen. Her widower brother-in-law, Changanacherry Koil Thampuran and Col. Monroe were there to guide and help her during those early years. Her own kind disposition, and inborn capacity helped her to keep the flag of prestige of Travancore flying high.

This Queen enacted a good many reforms for the welfare of the subjects and special attention was bestowed on the hardships of women, promotion of Malayalam, improvement of canals as the water ways or transportation links, codes of conduct of officers of the law, tax reliefs, impetus to coffee cultivation and many other varied matters. Sweeping reforms in education were ushered in.

Like those who ruled before, the Queen also shared one common bond which was the abiding involvement in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The Rani, from early childhood continued to be deeply committed to the affairs of this great Temple. Some of the buildings of the Temple which showed wear and tear were repaired and the *Oottu Pura* (used for serving food) was also improved. Apart from the structural aspect of the Temple, she turned her attention to many other related matters. In 990 ME/1814 AD, the very same year that she became the ruler, a code of conduct for the Temple staff was drawn up.<sup>308</sup> Along with it, instructions were issued on accepted conditions of entry into the Temple including purificatory formalities.<sup>309</sup> The young ruler was very strict about seeing that they were correctly observed. In 992 ME/1817 AD the *Illoms* (family houses) of the two sections of Brahmin priests who performed the ritualistic worship in the Temple, were identified.<sup>310</sup> Both the factions are still in operation and continue to be known as the *Akkara Desies* and *Ikkara Desies* (residing on either side of the Chandragiri river).

307. *Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi's predecessor and elder sister Rani Gouri Lekshmi Bayi also came to the throne following the unexpected demise of her uncle Bala Rama Varma. Neither of the two royal sisters had any expectation to the rulership of Venad.*

308. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 84, Olas 70 and 71.*

309. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2, Olas 86 - 89, year 990 ME/1815 AD.*

310. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 15, Ola 75.*



In 993 ME/1818 AD it was noticed that recurring pollutions were surfacing in the Temple. So Gouri Parvathi Bayi consulted an astrologer by name Karamana Ramaswamy Jyotsier and adopted remedial measures as revealed in the predictions. Out of the three *Garuda Vahanas* (vehicles fashioned in the form of the Lord's favourite attendant, the Garuda bird) the ones belonging to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy were kept and worshipped in the sanctum itself daily.<sup>311</sup> The Queen, on finding that they needed repair, had the same carried out after obtaining the *Anujna* from the *Ettara Yogam*. This was also in 993 ME/1818 AD.

Dewan Peshkar Venkata Rao assumed office in 994 ME/1819 AD. He rendered valuable assistance to the young Queen in the matters of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The inner shrine had shown need for repair and timber was brought from Alleppey by sea for use in the reconstruction of the same.<sup>312</sup>

An unusual phenomenon occurred in the Temple immediately after the customary night *Siveli* (circumambulation of the idols), in the main *Siveli* Idol of gold of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.<sup>313</sup> There manifested a superimposition of potency in this Idol which was experienced by the priest to whom it was initially transmitted. Later on when the Idol was replaced on its gold base it was found to be visibly shaking. The Queen was immediately informed of the same by the person holding the post known as *Anavaal* (ആനവാൾ) whose position bestowed on him the liberty of direct approach to the rulers when matters related to the Temple had to be conveyed, without awaiting prior sanction. She immediately reached the Temple and personally witnessed this event. (This is given in detail in the chapter *Miracles*).

In 995 ME/1820 AD the old copper roofing of the sanctum was replaced by new copper roofing.<sup>314</sup> The succeeding year witnessed the execution of another important feature. All the murals inside the inner areas of the Temple in the *Chuttambalam* (ചുട്ടമ്പലം) and *Cheruchuttu* (ചെറുചുട്ടു) were drawn during that time.<sup>315</sup> (Refer chapter *Abode of the Divine*). Many important steps were taken by the Queen that year itself. From the Temple records we find that she extended the duration of the festival of Thiru Ampati Krishna Swamy, which was till then for five days,<sup>316</sup> to a duration of ten days and made it on a par with the

311. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11, Ols 151 - 162.

312. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 95, Ola 117, year 994 ME/1819 AD.

313. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, Ola 142.

314. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 53, Ols 225 - 271.

315. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 53, Ols 270 - 273, year 996 ME/1821 AD.

316. 1. *Mathilakam Records* – In the month of Meenom (March/April) 996 ME/1821 AD Churuna 10, Ola 157.

2. Lt. Col. G.T. Thampi (Ex-Executive of officer, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple).



festival of the other two main Deities. The three beautifully crafted *Kamala Vahanas* (lotus vehicles) for the three Deities were brought from Kollam, one being in gold and the other two being in silver, for use during the *Utsavas*.<sup>317</sup> They were received in the Temple with lighting of encircling lamps and with ceremonial welcome. In like manner the lovely *Pallakku/Sibika Vahanas* (palanquins) were made in Kollam and brought here.<sup>318</sup> Ceremonies are recorded in this connection too. In Dharmaraja's time too the construction of the *Pallakku Vahanas* and their arrival in the Temple are mentioned. Perhaps the Queen remade them. In 996 ME/1821 AD itself she ordered an *Anki* in gold (an outer covering made to be placed over an Idol and as such fashioned as its exact replica in features, form and size) for Sree Padmanabha Swamy<sup>319</sup> and one in silver for Adi Sesha. The work on the gold *Anki* was completed in 997 ME/1822 AD and the *Anki* was placed on the main Idol of the Lord. Ceremonies were performed in this context and monetary offerings or *Dakshinas* given.<sup>320</sup>

In the year 1004 ME/1829 AD, the Queen's beloved nephew Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma attained sixteen years of age. Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi handed over the reins of Government of a peaceful and thriving land to him with great gladness and withdrew to a retired life in the contentment and satisfaction of having done her maximum in the service of her God and her State. Though the actual power stood transferred she continued to be held in great esteem by her subjects. During her long life span she saw both her nephews as Kings. They sought her advice often and were guided by her words.

When the Regent Rani relinquished power, her grateful nephew bestowed on her decidedly deserving person, all honours appertaining to a reigning sovereign.

In 1033 ME/1857 AD when her younger nephew Sree Uthrom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, sat on the Throne, the curtain rang down on the life of this illustrious personage. Her body was draped with the gold worked silk cloth which was covering the main Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy till then, an honour of highest distinction which was accorded only to the reigning monarchs.<sup>321</sup> Like her elder sister Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi also gifted to scrolls of memory an untarnished and shining record of undoubted merit.

---

317. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11, Olas 166 and 167, year 996 ME/1821 AD.

318. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 20, Ola 73, year 996 ME/1821 AD.

319. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 20, Olas 1 - 6.

320. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 15, Ola 90.

321. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 6, Olas 73 - 79.



## Sree Padmanabha Dasa Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma Kulasekhara Perumal

(Asterism Swathi, Month Medom, 988 ME/16th April 1813 AD - Birth  
Asterism Aswathi, Month Dhanu, 1022 ME/26th December 1846 AD - Demise  
Rule :1004 ME/1829 AD-1022 ME/1846 AD)

Sree Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma of enduring fame was born as the second child and first son of the reigning Sovereign Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi and Raja Raja Varma Valia Koil Thampuram of Changanacherry Palace. His birth, his rule, his life and his final union with Sree Padmanabha Swamy are all, in one way or the other, remarkable. He also remains as one of the most famous among great names which have adorned the Travancore Dynasty in ample measure, stepping across the confines of his own territory to reach levels of national and international fame even in the pulsating present.

The Queen had not delivered when the British Resident Col. Munroe informed the British Government in India that a Prince and heir to the Throne of Travancore had been born, as the threat of annexation was shadowing the land. Realising the enormity of his deed, he is said to have appealed to Sree Padmanabha Swamy to save the Travancore Throne and himself by giving a son to the Rani. Should this prove to be so, he promised many offerings to the Deity but also added that if his appeal to the Lord went unheard he would bring a canon to blow up the Temple. Whether such an action as the latter would have succeeded is highly doubtful, but the need to put it to test did not arise. Very soon, when the star was *Swathi*, a baby boy was born amidst great jubilation and relief, as the next King. Since his Sovereign authority was established even before he was born, he got the unique title *Garbhasreeman* (King while in the womb). Col. Munroe went up to the steps of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and after removing his hat and shoes knelt there and rendered his thanksgiving to God. In gratitude he submitted to the Temple along with a gaily decorated horse, a big circular gold-plated umbrella with green glass stones suspended all around the frame. This accompanies the Deities during the *Siveli* processions at the time of the festivals, even now. He also made an endowment to have a jaggery rice pudding (ശർക്കരപ്പായസം) offered daily to the *Perumal*, on his (Col. Munroe's) behalf. This was continued till the fairly recent past when the fund proved insufficient and the Colonel's surviving relatives in England were not interested in keeping it going.

So Sree Swathi Thirunal entered the world with a special aura of Providential grace. Coinciding with this royal advent, report reached the Queen that a rare white elephant had been captured from North Travancore hills. She accepted this as an auspicious omen. His illustrious mother passed away at a lamentably young age of twenty four. The burden of administration was then assumed by



his thirteen year old aunt — Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi. The most lasting influence on Sree Swathi Thirunal was exerted by her and by his esteemed father Changanacherry Koil Thampuran, both of whom he held in real affection and deep respect till the very end.

Even from childhood, the Prince showed signs of his future scholarly fame. He became an established linguist proficient in eighteen languages and could compose poems even in his teens. Veterans of Carnatic music imparted lessons to him which were to become undying notations of fame for this genius among men. He was a personage of many interests like art, music, astronomy, law, literature etc.

At the age of sixteen, in the year 1004 ME/1829 AD. Sree Swathi Thirunal assumed the reins of Government from the capable hands of Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi and became King of a thriving and prosperous land due to the enlightened and gracious rule of the two Queens — his mother and his aunt. The Regent Queen, on the other hand was only too happy and willing to entrust the domain of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as sacred charge to his young and capable hands. This large-hearted and far-sighted young ruler's progressive reforms and enactments of compassion are very many and continue to be recounted and remembered. Since the main spotlight is on the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and not on the historical representation of this exceptional ruler, his contributions and services to the Temple are given the full projection while selective administrative reforms are merely touched upon. This appears necessary to present a more clearly defined portrait of this King whose every action was coloured by the hue of devotion to his supreme Master Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Thiruvananthapuram had already become the established capital of Venad in the time of the noble 'Dharmaraja', but many of the Government offices were still operating in Kollam. The King had them all shifted to the capital as a vital step in presenting a comprehensive administration and in eliminating the need to be away from the Temple for long by his trips to Kollam. He strove to present an incorruptible system of Government and did not hesitate to take stern action against erring officials whoever they may be. The First Code of Regulations of Travancore, which forms the basis of the present judicial system, was formulated under his directives. Wide spread English education, the Trivandrum Observatory equipped with most sophisticated instruments set up in 1837 AD, collection and transcription of rare manuscripts (today's Oriental Manuscripts Library) in the Palace *Grantha-pura* (record room), printing press, menagerie with rare birds and a zoo, setting up of western type of hospitals, irrigation and construction works, dairy farming, clemency to women prisoners, abolition of different types of torture on suspects and criminals especially



flogging and the dreaded *Kaimukku Sathyam*<sup>322</sup> were some of the enactments of this great King. He also had the first census of the State taken. Special interest was exhibited in the upkeep of temples and palaces. The King received the whole, hearted backing from Dewan Venkata Rao and later on from Dewan Subha Rao.

Sree Swathi Thirunal was famed as a great patron of the varied art forms, literature and music. Himself a reputed scholar, art evaluator and master of music, the royal court was a meeting ground of luminaries from all these avenues. One very notable feature was that in those days when travel was neither quick nor easy, King Rama Varma's Court had international representation. Chinese, Japanese, Malayas, Arabs and Negroes too were brought to exhibit skills unfamiliar to Travancore. Great names in literature and music like Vidvan Raja Raja Varma Koil Thampuran, Irayimman Thampi, Meruswami, Palghat Parameswara Bhagavathar, Shadkala Govinda Marar, Vadivelu Nattuvanar and Thanjavoor Quartette were among the many who illumined his royal assembly which was always open to persons of calibre. A most significant entry is seen in the books. It mentions the arrival of Thanjavoor Thyagaraja Swamy an ascetic, along with two disciples and the amount paid to the disciples. A strong opinion circulates that he was indeed the great Thyagaraja Bhagavathar.

Sree Swathi Thirunal's solid contributions and many benefits derived from his reign which the present day unknowingly accepts as matter of course take a second seat when compared to the unfading peak of fame the King got and which has earned him a place of significance on the national map. This was in the realm of devotional music. Sree Swathi Thirunal's total adoration for and complete surrender to Sree Padmanabha Swamy found optimum expression in the outpourings of his musical compositions which projected an undulating graph of varied emotions of ecstasy, agony, longing and abject devotion or *Bhakti* which poured forth in an overflow that could not be stemmed. Different types of compositions for classical music and dance forms, narrations and verses known as *Slokas* in an amazing number of languages have taken life from the inspired vision of Sree Swathi Thirunal. Though he has written in praise of other Deities, the bulk of his works sing the glories of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. (Since the relevant works are elaborated in the chapter *Search of Sources* they are omitted here). Attention is drawn to one connected aspect all the same. It was customary in those days to add the composer's name in the body of the work e.g. Saint Thyagaraja's works etc. Sree Swathi Thirunal's *Mudra* (insignia) was not his name which has never featured anywhere but the sacred name of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, which has been used in almost all his works. His music and *Bhakti* were two sides of the same coin.

322. Details of this method of truth detection are featured in the introductory section of *Medieval History*.



Despite the great demands made by the Throne and indepth attention he bestowed on the administrative machinery, the Maharaja's first love was always Sree Padmanabha Swamy and His Temple, a love which developed to overwhelming proportions with the passage of time and turn of events. Like his ancestors, that was where he concentrated fully, free of all other pressures. To Sree Swathi Thirunal goes the credit of regularising the bi-annual festivals — *Alpashi* and *Painkuni Utsavas* of the months of *Thulam* (October/November) and *Meenom* (March/April) as well as the nine-day *Navarathri* festival.<sup>323</sup> The pattern laid down by him was minute and exhaustive and is the accepted procedure strictly followed to date. He decided on the types of *Vahanas* to be taken out on each of the ten days of the festival, the types of musical instruments to be played, directing when, where and what should be played at each instance. Only the Maharaja's compositions come to be played and many of them were composed by him for this very purpose. The *Mangala Vadyas*, played by a specific group of instrumentalists with clear directions on the procedure to be adopted when they perform, was introduced by this ruler (See chapter *Worship of the Celestial*). The *Utsava Prabandham* written by him beautifully describes the festival.

Sree Swathi Thirunal's later years became overshadowed by dark clouds of disquiet and disturbances as his relationship with the British Resident, General Cullen, steadily worsened. Cullen was adamant in adoption of an attitude of hostility to the King and his obstructive policies imposed great stress and mental strain on Sree Swathi Thirunal. Though deeply compassionate, he was a very strong personality, likened to Sree Narasimha Moorthy. But the traumas and tension reflected on the Maharaja's physical well-being as well. His health which had become delicate took a downward trend contributing to his growing withdrawal from the affairs of the State and from people as well. As he grew

323. There is a rare Temple of Sree Saraswathi Devi in the Padmanabhapuram Palace complex. The kings finally shifted to Thiruvananthapuram after making it the capital so that they could be close to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, enabling them to directly look into its management, avoiding what had proved many a time, dangerous delegation of duty. A vow was made to the Goddess by Sree Swathi Thirunal that the "Navaratri Festival" held in Her honor annually there in the month of Kanni (September/October) would thereafter be kept up with all splendor wherever the Royal Family resided by bringing the Deity there. This, by the grace of Above, continues unhindered despite political and territorial changes. The Devi Idol was the same worshipped by Saint Kambar of 9th century AD when he was writing the "Kamba Ramayanam". He handed the Idol over to the Kulasekhara Perumal before attaining "Samadhi" (forsaking his mortal coils). This exquisite Idol made of five metals "Pancha Loham" - is brought on elephant back to the Fort Palace near Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the festival celebrated. The Tarananallor Tantries perform the ritualistic worship. This festival too was set to a clearly defined form by Sree Swathi Thirunal and a system of musical presentation defined. The act of bringing the Devi from the Nanjanad area was also greatly helpful in soothing feelings of the locals and in the emotional integration of the two sections of people.

Nine "Navaratri Kirtanas" were specially composed by the King to be sung during the nine days of concerts on the "Navaratri Mandapam", in the praise of the Devi. This is being faithfully followed.



more and more introvert, it enhanced his almost obsessive dedication to his God and Temple. In his single-minded love for Sree Padmanabha Swamy which had become a very personal relationship and which he himself has described repeatedly as a "*supreme Divine romance*" he was never satisfied with his services to the Temple and the offerings submitted to Sree Padmanabha Perumal.

Sree Swathi Thirunal strictly observed all the vows related to the Temple. Many were the precious jewels, silks, and amounts of money submitted to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. One offering of special note was the *Valia Kanikka* (big money offering), which has been described by P. Shangoonny Menon thus. "*On one occasion the amount was one lakh of Surat rupees heaped in front of the Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the Maharaja took the numerous bags containing the rupees and poured the contents into silver vessels which were kept for this purpose. This work engaged His Highness about an hour and he had the determination of mind to go through the labour even in his delicate state of health*". It is said that the total cash offerings made by him over the years came to the tune of Rs. 30 lakhs.<sup>324</sup>

The King had reached a stage of self abnegation which made him intolerant of any praise of him. Vadivelu Nattuvanar once submitted a *Varnam* (classical musical composition) in praise of his patron Sree Swathi Thirunal. While the King appreciated the musical excellence, he directed that it should not be used again in this form as it was only Sree Padmanabha Swamy who should be lauded through music and not himself.<sup>325</sup>

The Maharaja performed the *Thulapurusha Danam* in 1004 ME/1829 AD and the *Hiranyagarbham* in 1009 ME/1834 AD by which he assumed the title 'Kulasekhara Perumal'. Some time hence, in the span of one year itself all the remaining fourteen *Danas* were also performed by the King. He appears to be one of the few rulers to have conducted all the *Shodasa Maha Danas* (sixteen great offerings) in the modern age. Sree Swathi Thirunal submitted a vessel made of gold for the ritualistic *Deeparadhana* for Sree Padmanabha Swamy and two in silver for Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy. A beautifully executed gemstudded gold Throne too was offered to the Perumal, so also two lamps of gold.

*Kulavazha Chirappu* with special *Pujas*, processions and decorations was introduced by Sree Swathi Thirunal to mark the birthdays of all the former Sovereigns from Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma downwards.<sup>326</sup> For this, every pillar especially in the *Sivelippura*, was decorated with a full bunch

324. Dr. S. Venkitasubramonia Iyer – *Swathi Thirunal and his Music*.

325. Dr. S. Venkitasubramonia Iyer – *Swathi Thirunal and his Music*.

326. 1. *Kulavazha* – Bunch of banana fruit with the entire spike.

2. *Erattakulavazha* – Stands for double the *Kulavazha*.

3. *Chirappu* – a festive offering of a religious nature.



of plantains, a sprout of sugar cane and a garland. Charmed by its beauty, he ordered the same in double number to be done for his own birthday as an offering. This came to be known as *Erattakulavazha Chirappu*.

Despite his concentration on the Temple with such sincerity, in 1014 ME/1839 AD it was discovered that the daily *Pujas* were faulty.<sup>327</sup> On being appraised of this situation, the King immediately adopted remedial measures and directives were issued to the Temple through the Palace officers. Sree Swathi Thirunal instituted another *Abhishekam* for the Lord and also one more sweet milk and rice food preparation popularly known as the *Ambalappuzha Palppayasam* in the same year. 1014 ME/1839 AD also saw repairs being carried out. The *Goshala*, *Namaskara Mandapam* (front platform) of Thiru Ampati Krishna Swamy as well as the *Chuttu Vilakku* (lamps supports) encircling the Kshetrapalan shrine were renovated.<sup>328</sup> The *Naveekarana Kalasam* (purificatory rites) pertaining to the renovation was duly performed.

In 1017 ME 1842 AD in an unusual gesture, the King had a chariot richly gilded with gold leaf, constructed for himself on the model of Arjuna's chariot as described in the Mahabharatham War, under directions from Veera Swamy Naidu.<sup>329</sup> Sree Swathi Thirunal went on a ceremonial procession in the city in this chariot. To mark the event, a jewelled pendant was offered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by him.

In 1021 ME/1846 AD the King had a new *Siveli* Idol of the Deity made in gold and the purificatory rites conducted thereof.<sup>330</sup>

Rendering of the *Vishnu Puranam* and *Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabhandham* on daily basis and singing of *Bhaja Govindam* by a troupe appointed for this purpose, were started. The imposing *Indra Vahanam* resembling the *Gopuram* used for *Siveli* processions was said to have been visualised by him. Numerous indigenous arts including many from Tamil Nadu were greatly encouraged during his reign.

To facilitate the large influx of pilgrims into the Temple from different parts of India, the King appointed people conversant with many languages to act as guides. The post has continued thereafter and is of much help to the pilgrims.

In order to regain the prestige which Travancore once enjoyed, Sree Swathi Thirunal approached the British Government with success for re-minting of

327. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 8, Ola 163.

328. *Kshetrapalan* is a guardian / sentinel of the Temple.

329. (*Gist of the whole para*) *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 20, Olas 79 and 80. Today this chariot is displayed in the Sree Chithra Enclave for the public to view. (*Museum Complex*).

330. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 21, Olas 15 and 16.



gold coins. Minting of gold coins was deemed to be a symbol of sovereignty. The King held that these coins were inevitable as ritual gifts to the Namboodiries during Temple festivals like *Pattathanam* (identifying and honouring the Vedic scholars).

Sree Swathi Thirunal was so great a devotee that an element of super-human power came to be associated with him. (Dr. Venkitasubramonia Iyer – *Swathi Thirunal and his Music*). It is said that once during an *Arat* procession, an elephant got out of hand (or, as is believed, was made to get out of hand) and ran amuck. People scattered hither and thither in panic and none could approach it. It ran straight along the path on which the King stood. He held his ground unflinchingly and with one look was able to check the elephant. An amazing change came over it and it went on its knees, trembling, its tusks boring the ground. Onlookers witnessed the fearsome figure of a lion superimposed on the King, which they believed to be Sree Narasimha Swamy. From then onward he was deemed to be an incarnation of Sree Narasimha Swamy.

Strength and life were slowly but surely ebbing out of the King. He withdrew more and more into a world where only he and the Beloved of his being existed. It was as though the mind and heart had already fled to their Master and the body was just lingering on awaiting final Divine summons. When his servant came to attend on him in the early hours of the 26th morning, the life force had already departed.

There is a popular narration connected with Sree Swathi Thirunal's final journey. When the Periya Nambi unlocked the door of the sanctum for the first early morning worship in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, he was aghast to find the King in Temple attire inside the securely bolted sanctum, at the feet of the reclining figure of the Lord, in an attitude of abject devotion. Since it was impossible, the astounded priest stood by in total confusion. At the same moment the music of mourning arose in the early morning silence, signalling that the King had passed away. The characteristic figure inside the shrine too vanished simultaneously.

Great was the grief within the royal circles and among the people who had loved this exceptional personality. The sacred gold worked silk (പ്രായശ്ചിത്ത പട്ട) draped on the main Idol was thence removed and brought to cover the still body of the King as was customary for reigning heads.<sup>331</sup>

At the age of thirty three Sree Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma set forth to his appointment with destiny, leaving for posterity unfading echoes of the pulsations of a living heart with all its peaks and depths, now transformed into a saga of supreme love which had merged at the lotus feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

331. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 6, Olas 58 - 66, year 1022 ME/1843AD (13th of Dhanu).*



## Sree Padmanabha Dasa Uthrom Thirunal Marthanda Varma

1022-1036 ME/7th January 1847-18th August 1860 AD

At the age of thirty two, Marthanda Varma ascended the Throne following the untimely demise of his much loved elder brother Sree Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma.

Marthanda Varma is described in all books on record as a genial, humble, warm and caring personality, generous in the extreme and the most sweet-tempered among the line of rulers. There was none to utter an ill word against him. He was also a scholar-writer and deeply involved with chemistry and modern medical systems. With the help and guidance of the English doctor, Dr. Brown, and other knowledgeable persons, he became proficient in Western medicine. Many are those from within and without the Palace who were treated by his own hands. This service was extended to those Namboodiries who came to the capital city to participate in the *Murajapam* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and who were very conservative in subjecting themselves to an alien form of treatment. He persuaded them to take vaccination administered by his own hands. Sree Uthrom Thirunal had an ivory skeleton made to study the structure of the human body, for it was (and is) considered polluting to touch a corpse or skeleton as it would necessitate purificatory processes. (This skeleton is seen today in the Natural History Museum in the Thiruvananthapuram Zoo complex).

The ascension of Sree Uthrom Thirunal came at a time when the State was in an adverse plight in many respects, unlike the time of his late brother who had inherited a flourishing kingdom. Though financial collapse appeared to loom large, he riveted all his attention on somehow pulling it out of that chasm. With the help of his able officers he was reasonably successful. Affairs had taken a turn for the better to such an extent that the Maharaja was able to conduct the costly *Thulapurusha Danam* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in 1025 ME/ 1849 AD.

Subsequently the tide turned and natural calamities struck in the form of floods and famine. Certain administrative policies of the British worsened the situation. It was an uphill task to keep the land from total financial collapse and this was achieved only through direct Divine grace. When things improved, the King conducted the elaborate *Hiranyagarbham* in the Temple in 1029 ME/ 1854 AD and assumed the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal' as per tradition.

In the same year the *Padma Teertham* was dredged and cleaned.<sup>332</sup>

The *Murajapam* was conducted in 1033 ME/1857 AD. In honour of this great event the Fort Area including the entrances and the city as a whole were

332. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2 Olas 194 - 197.*



cleaned up and beautified. In all the steps taken by the Maharaja, he had the solid backing of his successive Dewans, Krishna Rao and Sir. T. Madhava Rao.

Sree Uthrom Thirunal was a patron of arts and a scholar but his passion was for drama and *Kathakali*, especially the latter. He collected fifty six *Attakathas* or *Kathakali* stories and established a printing press for publishing them. His special attention was centered on the *Kathakali* performances staged in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Because of his almost obsessive liking for drama, the King had one staged during the period of birth pollution which was against the accepted code of conduct.<sup>333</sup> As such he had to perform an atonement ritual for it in the Temple. (He was the designer of the pillarless hall on the beach to avoid obstruction of vision during performance of *Kathakali* plays).

The King was very strict in the discharge of his duties to the Temple. He was deeply devout by nature and though by the time his Temple worship and personal prayers were over it would be late afternoon in the day, and near midnight at night, he would partake of food only then.

In 1030 ME/1855 AD, Sree Uthrom Thirunal had detailed instructions put down in writing on the special rituals pertaining to the Temple like relinquishing of office by Nambies, performance of *Kalasas* (purificatory rites) etc.<sup>334</sup>

Like his royal predecessors, Marthanda Varma too was particular that tradition and custom should be followed and in case of doubts the Temple records would be the deciding authority. Due to the occurrence of the solar eclipse, the time of raising the flag marking the *Alpashi* festival was delayed till dusk as against the existing custom of it being done in the morning hours, after consulting to the records in 1023 ME/1847 AD, in the first year of the King's reign.<sup>335</sup>

The Maharaja fell seriously ill at the age of forty six. Despite the best available treatment, he showed no positive response and on the eve of his birthday in 1036 ME/1860 AD he started to fade away. All the *Danas* and rituals conducted, the Maharaja permitted all members of his family, officers and servants to see him in his final leave-taking. A few minutes thereafter he quietly left his body and passed on without struggle or agony, as a grief stricken assembly stood by, sunk in sorrow. The gentle devotion and sweetness that was Sree Uthrom Thirunal continues to waft down through the rambling avenues of history, as a fragrance that never fades.

333. *Mathilakam Records* – Vol. 1 p. 74.

334. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2 Olas 92 to 95.

335. 1. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11 Olas 254 - 257.  
2. *Mathilakam Records* – Vol. 1 p. 54.



## Sree Padmanabha Dasa Maharaja Ayillyom Thirunal Rama Varma 1036 - 1055 ME/ 1860 - 1880 AD

Sree Ayillyom Thirunal Rama Varma was born to Rani Rugmini Bayi, sister of Maharajas Swathi and Uthrom Thirunals. Like his uncles he was also not behind in versatility of talents, was a reputed linguist, scholar, author, patron of arts and musician. His mother and his father Valia Koil Thampuram of Thiruvalla Paliakkara Palace, were themselves accomplished in arts and letters. Sree Uthrom Thirunal Rama Varma, his esteemed uncle, used to consult the Yuvaraja on many issues seeing in him an administrative ability which future years brought to light more convincingly. He encouraged his royal nephew to acquaint himself with the affairs of the Temple and the throne, an exposure which was to serve him well later. Sree Ayillyom Thirunal Rama Varma ascended the Throne at the age of twenty nine. In the first year of his reign itself, famine struck with a forceful hand due to failure of rains and attack of black caterpillars on the crops. The first priority became the reduction of dire distress due to starvation and so diversion of funds for it became unavoidable. This did not discourage Sree Rama Varma in the least from pursuing his benign policies. To the everlasting credit of this enlightened and kind hearted King stand many enactments like abolition of burdensome taxes including tobacco monopoly, setting up of hospitals, a lunatic asylum, many educational institutions like the Arts College and Law College, checking smuggling, constructing canals etc. Great strides were taken in girls' education. The Napier Museum, the famous Varkala Tunnel No. 1 and the Secretariat were his outstanding contributions. The King was fortunate in having three persons of exceptional calibre to help him – Dewan Sir. T. Madhava Rao, Sir. A. Seshiah Shastri and Sir. Nanoo Pillai. Sree Ayillyom Thirunal was the first ruler of Travancore to be officially bestowed with the title of '*Maharaja*' by the British Government.

Since his illustrious ancestors had, as a result of undeviated devotion, contributed so much to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, this Maharaja was not required to initiate any large scale plan of action. This did not however check him from submitting his services to the Lord. Certain noteworthy entries appear in the Temple records. As an experimental measure a system of gold currency was introduced carrying the symbol of dynastic devotion on the coins namely the representations of the imposing eastern *Gopuram* and half *Gopuras*. They were struck and issued from the Government mint. As they did not prove successful, they were later withdrawn.

An early notable record is that of the interruption of the *Alpashi Utsavam* following the written communication from North *Illom* by messenger intimating the demise of Tarananalloor Govindan Padmanabhan. As such the festival became extended. This was in 1038 ME/1862 AD.



Strict supervision over the management of the Temple and other religious institutions was carried out by Sree Ayillyom Thirunal. Temple functions and ceremonies received his full attention. Yet in 1041 ME/1866 AD, a fearsome roar, like that of a lion, was heard from within the Temple at night.<sup>336</sup> It was deemed a bad omen.

One utilitarian action of the Maharaja, connected with the Temple, was the cleaning up of the *Padma Teertham* and restoration of the canal perennially feeding it. This was of much benefit to the people of the Fort Area also as it ensured unfailing supply of good water.

Necessary repairs were executed to the eastern pagoda of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. In 1045 ME/1870 AD, on seeing signs of wear and tear on the *Pallakku Vahanam* used during festivals, repairs to the same were beautifully carried out.<sup>337</sup>

In 1045 ME/1870 AD, certain significant offerings received by the Temple are noted. One is the Cochin Maharaja's submission of a pure silk length and a pendant.<sup>338</sup> Another entry states the donation of ghee for the perpetual lamp inside the sanctum by the *Thirunavaya Yogam* (of Namboodiries), which held a prominent place on the religious canvas of Kerala.<sup>339</sup>

In 1048 ME/1873 AD the Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna idol, which was found shaky and had started to slant, was refixed by *Ashtabandham* with a compound of certain specified ingredients.<sup>340</sup> A policy decision was adopted to utilise paper as the medium of correspondence thereafter in the administration of the Temple.<sup>341</sup>

In 1052 ME/1877 AD, the eastern *Gopuram* was repaired and the gold globular structures on the top were refixed.<sup>342</sup> In the same year a silver lamp and gold utensil used in *Deeparadhana* were stolen. Corrective measures were adopted.

Though not directly connected with the Temple, the patronage extended to the world famous painter, artist Ravi Varma of Kilimanoor Palace, put Travancore on the international forum of painting. It cannot be forgotten that it was Ravi Varma who brought the Divinities to the homes of the common folk through exquisite paintings, copies of which are seen almost everywhere in India.

336. *Mathilakam Records – Volume I, Page 56.*

337. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 88, Ola 103.*

338. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 16, Ols 124 - 128.*

339. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 88, Ola 106.*

340. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 88, Ola 41.*

341. *Mathilakam Records – Volume 2, Page 94.*

342. *Mathilakam Records – Volume II P. 228.*



Backtracking a little, mention is being made of an important landmark in the dynastic adoptions which abound in the Travancore Royal Family which is of consequence here as the links binding the Temple and the throne cannot be separated. The order of Her Majesty Queen Victoria was forwarded to the Maharaja in 1037 ME/1862 AD, conveying the assurance that on failure of natural heirs, the British Government would permit and confirm the adoption of any person as successor made by His Highness or any of his successors in accordance with the laws and customs of the State.

As per custom and belief, the Maharaja performed the *Thulapurusha Danam* and the *Hiranyagarbham* to assume the ancient title of his ancestors – ‘Kulasekhara Perumal’. The *Murajapam* functions were conducted as usual.

The enlightened administration under Sree Ayillyom Thirunal once again raised the State of Sree Padmanabha Swamy to the position of the ideal State among the princely domains of India. Despite the trauma and distress shadowing his personal life, the King presented a benign and model reign resting on the concept of justice. Travancore again came to be known as the ‘Land of Charity’ as it was often alluded to in the past, rendering help to the countless numbers, who flocked to it, seeking its munificence (especially after some natural calamity struck outside Travancore).

Maharaja Ayillyom Thirunal fell seriously ill at the age of forty nine. In the early hours of a morning in the month of *Medom* 1055 ME/May 1880 AD, he breathed his last. Oral tradition has it that he expired with these words on his lips, “*I merge myself now with Sree Krishna Paramatma*”.

## **Sree Padmanabha Dasa Maharaja Vishaghom Thirunal Rama Varma**

**1055 - 1060 ME/ 1880 - 1885 AD**

This Prince, the fifth and youngest among the five brothers, succeeded his elder brother Maharaja Ayillyom Thirunal to the Throne when he was forty three years of age. He was one of the few rulers whose eminence had already preceded him especially for his unquestioned command over the pen. The premier literary publications of India at that time, *The Calcutta Review* included, have carried many of his in-depth articles. “*Never did a Maharaja ascend the Musned with more universal applause*”.

Rani Rugmini Bayi, Vishaghom Thirunal’s mother expired when he was just eight months old and the responsibility of his upbringing fell on two illustrious personages – his great-aunt Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi of historic fame and his illustrious scholarly father, the Koil Thampuram of Thiruvalla Paliakkara Palace. His thirst for knowledge despite his delicate health was further fostered by his tutors Subha Rao, past Dewan, and T. Madhava Rao,



future Dewan of Travancore. His valued contributions to journals are numerous and much applauded and twelve among them are rated outstanding. They include a set of descriptive pamphlets concerning the Temple matters relating to the *Murajapam* and the two great ritualistic offerings, the *Thulapurusha Danam* and *Hiranyagarbham*, which provide a wealth of detailed studies of these great ceremonies of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. It is said that the last light to go out and the first to come on in the city of Thiruvananthapuram was the light on the Maharaja's desk.

Though unconnected directly with the Temple his vast knowledge of and interest in literature, science and agriculture won him encomiums not only from India, but from overseas also. Sree Vishaghom Thirunal's name became a household word all over Kerala because of his unforgettable contribution, tapioca, which made its maiden entry due to him. He held that should a time ever come when rice would become too costly for the poor man's purse, there should be a next best substitute and that was tapioca, as none in the Land of Sree Padmanabha Swamy should starve. His words proved prophetic. Revenue Survey and Settlement was undertaken. Corruption was stamped out with an iron hand. Every single department of administration was re-organised in an almost obsessive haste. This was explained by the King himself. He had a premonition that like most of his predecessors, his own life span too would be at a premium and this spurred him on to ceaseless activity. This intuition was based on astrology in which he excelled. His correspondence would invariably carry the words "*during the five years of our reign....*" that too was destined to be unfailingly accurate.

Uncompromising by nature, he did not spare himself also, especially when it came to the question of his own prayers and discharge of Temple duties. Even failing health was no reason to be flexible with regard to the King's commitment to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Authorities on history, when evaluating Sree Vishaghom Thirunal and his rulership, have specially observed the King's sincere faith in religious efficacy and the zeal and piety with which he performed the rituals and submitted offerings. He conducted the *Thulapurusha Danam* and the *Hiranyagarbham* and assumed the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal', without delay. It was his desire to perform yet another complex and costly ritual known as *Padmagarbham* qualifying for the title of *Kiritapati* but he did not live to accomplish it.<sup>343</sup>

Sree Vishaghom Thirunal with his eye for detail and thirst for correctness got clarifications incorporated into certain sections of the Temple manuals. The pollution directions to be observed by the different castes were put down

343. To a reader unfamiliar with Hindu rites and rituals, such offerings may seem incomprehensible or beyond reason. Only a real study of the principles and ethics underlining them can provide a clearer grasp of the subject.



in black and white in 1056 ME/1881 AD.<sup>344</sup> One grand contribution made by the Maharaja that year was the magnificent *Anki* excellently executed in silver in life size for the towering figure of Sree Hanuman Swamy.<sup>345</sup> The expenditure was met not directly from the Temple funds, but the money required was made by sale of butter daily offered to this Idol. This is a small example of his administrative ability.

He had two Dwarapalakas finished in that year. Their exact location is not available.<sup>346</sup> He also got the roof of the *Bhadradeepa Mandapam* done in copper.<sup>347</sup> The *Ananta Vahanam* was re-done following the need for repairs.<sup>348</sup>

A very touching event appears in the Temple records of the year 1057 ME/1825 AD.<sup>349</sup> When His Highness got back from Kashi, the people joined together and conducted a *Chirappu*, a special offering, in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in commemoration of his safe return. This was at variance with the prevailing customs according to which public participation was not encouraged.

It was this Maharaja who seems to have specified the steps to be adopted especially with regard to the financial responsibility in the event of *Samadhi* (demise of a religious person or saint) of the Pushpanjali Swamiyar.<sup>350</sup> Should this event occur while the Swamiyar held office, while the prescribed rites rested with the Temple, the expenses for the same were to devolve upon the Throne. This once again emphasises the intertwining of the two institutions. Such an event came to pass as the Pushpanjali Swamiyar in power attained *Samadhi* in 1058 ME/1883 AD; during the King's time.

By a royal decree in the year 1059 ME/1884 AD, the Maharaja forbade entry of persons under the influence of intoxicants.<sup>351</sup> This was a wise act enhancing the sanctity and safety of the Temple premises.

In 1059 ME/1884 AD it was decided to introduce stamped receipts for all payments from the Temple.<sup>352</sup>

In addition to the clarifications regarding the Swamiyar, made a couple of years earlier, elucidation on certain procedural aspects relating to rites and rituals were formulated in 1060 ME/1885 AD after consulting the appropriate authorities and sources. It was spelt out clearly that in the event of the Nambi,

344. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2, Ola 84.

345. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 87, Olas 154 and 155.

346. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, Olas 55 - 56.

347. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, Ola 59.

348. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, Ola 53.

349. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna, Volume 11, Page 102.

350. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 15, Ola 108.

351. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, Ola 84.

352. 1. *Mathilakam Manuals*– Volume 1, Page 11. 2. *Mathilakam Records* - Churuna 87, Ola 2.



and failing him the Tantri, being unable to perform the religious rites in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, it would rest upon the Swamiyar to perform them.<sup>353</sup>

The *Mathilakam* scrolls record the submission of money to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by the Zamorin of Calicut in the year 1060 ME/1885 AD.<sup>354</sup>

We see from the Temple records that on the *Palli Vetta* of the *Painkuni* festival of the year under review, there was a lunar eclipse. As per Hindu custom, during the eclipse temples and places of worship have to remain shut. As such the *Vetta* ceremony which normally never took place before 8.00 p.m. was advanced to before 6.00 p.m. according to the decision of the religious authorities of the Temple, so that everything would be over before the eclipse commenced. The Temple records were also checked for guidelines.

During a brief and brilliant period of five years Sree Vishaghom Thirunal compressed what is normally achieved in one life-time. The light that burnt on his royal desk was lamentably extinguished for all time in 1060 ME/1885 AD<sup>355</sup> but the lamp that shines in the memory of a grateful land still radiates its lustre on the parchment of names of the great ones of India.

## Sree Padmanabha Dasa Maharaja Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma

1061 - 1099 ME/1885 - 1924 AD

Born to Chathayom Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi (sister of Maharajas Ayillyom and Vishaghom Thirunals) and Changanacherry Koil Thampuram, Sree Moolam Thirunal was last in the line of rulers whose mothers were adopted direct from *Kola Swaroopam*. In 1034 ME/1859 AD, Sree Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma was surrendered to the family Deity Sree Padmanabha Swamy as laid down by tradition and assumed the title of 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' on his first birthday. Even from boyhood Sree Moolam Thirunal was a keen scholar. Orthodox and meticulous, these characteristics were clearly mirrored in the later years too in his outlook on his most sacred charge — the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Having already been recognised as the heir to the ancient Throne of Travancore by the British Government, there was no confusion when the time came for Sree Moolam Thirunal's accession, at the age of twenty eight. Unlike many of his illustrious predecessors, this King was blessed with a long life and as such

353. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 7, Olas 106 - 109.

354. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 11, Olas 258 - 267.

355. *Sree Vishaghom Thirunal's demise occurred in the Malayalam month of Karkkatakam under the asterism Swathi. As we pass on, future events too will reveal that this combination of star and month, by some coincidence, witnesses gloom and trauma in the Royal House of Travancore.*



was given thirty nine fruitful years by fate to serve his Master and the State, which he did outstandingly well.

The guiding hand of the senior members and his inbuilt generous temperament contributed to the success story which was his reign. On assuming the status of Maharaja, the sweeping reforms introduced by him were of immense administrative, political and social value and more or less all-comprehensive in character. Many improvements were ushered in the areas of irrigation, revenue, excise, law, postal system, education starting at primary level and going on to specialised colleges and health and hospitals, changing the face of the State. The Connemara Market and the Oriental Manuscripts Library in Thiruvananthapuram owe their existence to this King. The Panchayat Courts and two Houses of Legislature, were the starting points of modern democratic rule in India itself. In the speech delivered at his public installation in 1061 ME/1885 AD,<sup>356</sup> while praying to the "*Author of all good*", his family Deity Sree Padmanabha Swamy, for His continued grace, Sree Moolam Thirunal expressed his satisfaction that "*This ancient kingdom under the fostering care of our predecessors has entered on a career of material prosperity never before known....*" Since his reforms and innovations do not fall within the purview of the subject matter, they are being touched upon only to throw light on his ability and capacity as the Maharaja, which while commanding time and energy in a compelling measure, was in no way permitted to dilute the strength of his major commitment as *Dasa* to his acknowledged Master.

Renovations and repair of the Temple were promptly attended to. In the very year of his installation orders were issued for making a new *Garuda Vahanam*. The *Vahanas* were repaired as and when found necessary.<sup>357</sup> A big metal bell was suspended at the western entrance.<sup>358</sup> An enclosure made of iron rods was erected around the Sree Hanuman Swamy in the *Belikkal* area. In 1063 ME/1888 AD, the duties of the musical instrument players were regularised.<sup>359</sup> In the same year orders were given for making the Thrones in gold, silver and ivory for the Temple.<sup>360</sup>

In 1067 ME/1891 AD the wall of the Sree Veda Vyasa shrine was restored. Sree Moolam Thirunal also performed the *Thulapurusha Danam* in 1067 ME/1891 AD and the *Hiranyagarbham* in 1069 ME/1894 AD in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple to enable him to assume the age old title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal.' In 1068 ME/1893 AD it was decided to levy a fee on those who applied for the *Mathilakam* Records.<sup>361</sup> His religious interest was

356. V. Nagam Aiya – *The State Manual of Travancore*.

357. *Mathilakam Records* – Volume 11, P. 96.

358. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, Ola 90.

359. *Mathilakam records* – Vol. 2, P. 228.

360. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 87, Ola 127 and Vol. I P. 88.

361. *Mathilakam Records* – Vol. II P. 92.



widespread and the Temple records register significant gift of land in Kaladi, the birth place of Adi Sree Sankaracharya, by him for the establishment of the *Sankara Madhom*.

The *Ponnum Siveli* was systematised in 1065 ME/1890 AD.

Sree Moolam Thirunal was known as the 'Orthodox Prince' as he was very conservative in outlook with regard to the conduct of religious affairs and Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple matters and would consent to no compromise with change. He insisted on the accurate observance of precedents.

The Maharaja's extreme of affinity to anything connected with this Temple might have prompted him to issue a directive in 1070 ME/1895 AD stating that no person related to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple should be taken under warrant of arrest.<sup>362</sup>

A much acclaimed and important act was that of 1070 ME/1894-95 AD by which the *Viruthikar* were exempted from compulsory supply of provisions to the temples including Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. These people were expected to supply the items at a price, usually low, fixed by the temples which had originally made available these lands to them. With the passage of time it had become burdensome for them to provide the commodities because the price fell far below the cost and due to the fact that many holdings had changed hands or character. Under this act the *Viruthi* services underwent a radical revision.

The sacred *Cheratta* (coconut shell) in which Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar offered his famous initial raw mango offering had been preserved with great reverence in the Temple and daily used to submit this offering.<sup>363</sup> With the passage of time it started to deteriorate and bits got broken off. Maharaja Moolam Thirunal was appraised of this and he immediately ordered that the shell should be covered with gold to prevent further decay and also that it be adorned with precious gems. This was in 1071 ME/1896 AD.

In 1072 ME/1897 AD, the *Ashtabandham* (refixing of the idol) was conducted in the Thiru Ampati Temple.<sup>364</sup>

It seems to be the delight of destiny that the family of 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' should repeatedly face the necessity of adoption so that the service to the Lord would unceasingly continue. As such, once again in 1076 ME/1900 AD, two young *Thampuratties* (Kshatriya girls) of the ages of four and five were adopted from the Uthsavamadhom Palace, Mavelikkara,<sup>365</sup> for the second time. (The Maharaja faced the tragic loss of four nephews and one niece during his

362. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, *Olas* 13 & 14.

363. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 88, *Ola* 23 and Vol. 2 P. 92.

364. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 21, *Olas* 61 - 86.

365. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 9, *Olas* 164 - 187. They were first cousins.



life time.)<sup>366</sup> Pooradom Thirunal Sethu Lakshmi Bayi and Moolam Thirunal Sethu Parvathi Bayi, the two adopted child princesses performed the *Pati* and *Patiyettam* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, and were accepted as members of the Thrippappoor Swaroopam under the official designation of *Attingal Kochu Thampurans*.<sup>367</sup>

In the month of *Adi* of the Malayalam year 1077 ME/1902 AD, a stone *Mandapam*, modestly engraved, was erected under orders of Sree Moolam Thirunal by Anandaramayyar for the three Deities to halt after arriving at the sea shore for the *Arat* ceremonies. Story has it that this spot was selected after the Maharaja had made a pact of prayer with the Sea God Varuna, that there would be no encroachment of the waves beyond that limit. The fisher folk living within this orbit have full faith in this belief and even when the sea is angry they do not worry about their safety.

There is a significant episode illustrating this Maharaja's unwavering emotional and devotional bondage to his God. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, was on an official visit to Travancore. As he was driving with the King in the coach to their destination, they had to pass the imposing eastern pagoda of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Sree Moolam Thirunal stood up, removed his foot wear and folded his hands in homage. When the Viceroy was appraised of what this edifice was, he responded in a way the Maharaja took great exception to. Two versions of his remark are reported "*Is this where the heathens say their prayers?*" and "*Is this where idle Brahmins are fed?*" Sree Moolam Thirunal did not reply but on reaching the destination sent word to the authorities that he was completely dissociating himself with all functions organised for the Viceroy. Such a stand could have been construed as an insult to the Viceroy and consequently to the Sovereign of England and could have easily cost the Maharaja his throne. Though he realised the gravity of the situation, his sense of outrage at Lord Curzon's question about the Temple would allow him no elasticity despite counsel and pressure to revise his stand. Finally Lord Curzon had to be enlightened of the situation and he immediately despatched an apology in writing to the Maharaja for unwittingly causing him such offence. It was only thereafter that Sree Moolam Thirunal extended his participation.

1086 ME/1911 AD saw the Delhi Durbar of King George. The Government of India ruled that all the Princes of India should submit to the Emperor, gold sovereigns in a length of silk signifying *Nazar*, feudal symbol of vassalage. Sree Moolam Thirunal at once objected and declined to do so on the grounds

366. *The youngest nephew among the four of them, Prince Aswathi Thirunal, secured the distinction of being the first B.A. degree holder among all the native Princes of India.*

367. *K. Hariharakrishnan – Venattu Rajavamsham (Unpublished Manuscript) as well as many other texts on Travancore History.*



that Sree Padmanabha Swamy was his only Overlord. This also could have invited serious reaction. Subsequently all the other rulers raised their objection and the directive was withdrawn.

The two *Arat* processions of the Temple and the Rain-God Indra seem to have an unwritten understanding and this has often been proved. A story goes that the rains had come down with heavy hand during one *Utsavam* and showed no signs of abating even as the time for the commencement of the *Arat* procession drew near. Sree Moolam Thirunal is said to have got out, looked heavenward and prayed a few minutes. As though a master switch was operated, the rains suddenly stopped.<sup>368</sup>

Every rule has an exception, it is said, and the *Painkuni* festival of 1099 ME/1924 AD was such. The Maharaja who had been keeping indifferent health chose to disregard medical advice that he should not submit his system to the strain of walking the whole length of *Arat* procession, which was the usual custom especially as the elements appeared unfavourably disposed. Despite all this he participated in the procession in heavy rain and in all the rituals. Not long after, his health started to decline. Many of his words and actions, in retrospect, made others realise that he had a strong premonition that the curtain was going to ring down for him before the new year. Though unwell, he discounted all advice of doctors and insisted on going to the Temple on a particular day. On returning he took to bed never to get up again. In the Malayalam month of *Karkkatakam* (July) when the asterism was *Swathi*, Maharaja Moolam Thirunal breathed his last leaving the stable and prosperous land of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in the tender hands of his twelve year old heir and nephew Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma. The month and star are of special note as his immediate predecessor and uncle, Maharaja Vishaghom Thirunal, also passed away in the same month and under the same star, years ago.

The two gigantic bells placed on either side of the *Natakashala Mukappu* are said to have been fixed there in the time of Sree Swathi Thirunal.<sup>369</sup> Weighing five hundred pounds they used to be rung to announce royal demises or other calamities to the State. These mighty bells pealed continuously for half an hour signifying the passing away of another great son of the soil, Sree Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma.

The customary Temple honours due to a reigning Sovereign were accorded to him. An extremely precious benediction which has somehow been missed out during the deciphering of the *Churunas* but which Sree Moolam Thirunal

368. This seemingly amazing characteristic of the rains has been witnessed by many, a number of times later also. The author too is eye-witness to these sudden cessations of what was a virtual downpour just before the procession was about to start.

369. K. Hariharasuthan – Venattu Rajavamsham (Unpublished Manuscript).



was blessed to receive on his final voyage, is presented here. This has been conveyed to the author by an eye witness to the event, Sri N. Subramonia Iyer who was at that time employed in the Temple. This eighty eight year old Brahmin who spent all his life from the age of fifteen in the Temple and the Palace service is still in possession of a very keen memory. He narrates with full confidence that a flame was taken from the lamp inside the sanctum to light the one placed near the inert form of the Maharaja. Later it was this sacred flame that ignited the funeral pyre.

Many are the monumental reforms of present day significance which pay homage to the memory of this exceptional ruler, whose service, however, all through to the end was primarily to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

### **Sree Padmanabha Sevini (Vanchi Dharma Vardhini) Pooradom Thirunal Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi**

**1100 – 1107 ME/1924 – 1931 AD**

Maharaja Moolam Thirunal adopted two young girls Setu Lakshmi Bayi and Setu Parvathi Bayi, who were cousins, from the Utsavamadom Palace, Mavelikkara, for the continuation of the family. When the Maharaja passed away, his heir Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma was only twelve years old. As such the responsibility and duty to administer the land fell on Pooradom Thirunal Setu Lakshmi Bayi.<sup>370</sup> She ruled the land as the Regent for seven years from 1100-1107 ME/1924-1931AD, presenting a gracious and able rule.

Deeply religious, she took steps to abolish practices like animal sacrifice and the *Devadasi* system, though neither was applicable to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This Temple too had *Devadasies* but that was in the far off past and had come to an end long before. Establishment of the Scouts and Guides Movement, electrification of roads, construction of the Neendakara bridge and augmenting irrigation and road services were all her achievements.

One important social reform was that the roads running around the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and all other temples of the State were opened to lower castes who could not till then use them. In this context it has to be recollected that even during the prior periods, these communities had been allowed to display their artistic and acrobatic expertise on the road in front of this Temple as *Arangams* during festivals.

In February 1929, the then *Naduvil Madhom* Pushpanjali Swamiyar, Sree Sree Mayapallippadu Vasudeva Bharathikal, attained *Samadhi* while in residence at Thiruvananthapuram (For details see chapter *Worship of the Celestial*).

<sup>370.</sup> *The Maharani Regent's branch consists of Uthrom Thirunal Lalithamba Bayi, elder daughter, her children and other successors and Karthika Thirunal Indira Bayi, younger daughter and her children and successors.*



The Maharani was careful in observing the customs of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and supervised their smooth procedure. She did not make any fundamental changes in the Temple in her position as the Regent.

One socially progressive reform the Maharani introduced was that she brought about modifications in the dress regulations of the women employees of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. In 1107 ME/1931 AD, she handed over the reins of administration of a prosperous State to her young nephew Sree Chithira Thirunal and withdrew from active administrative life.

## **Sree Padmanabha Dasa Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma**

1. 1107-1124 ME/1931-1949 AD - As Sree Padmanabha Dasa and Maharaja of Travancore.
2. 1124-1131 ME/1949-1956 AD - As Sree Padmanabha Dasa and Rajpramukh.
3. 1131-1166 ME/1956-1991 AD - As Sree Padmanabha Dasa.

I desire to clarify a very vital aspect even at the commencement of this chapter. It is most difficult for me as I am writing about a personality under whose shade and in the warmth and security of whose love, my family and I have lived all our lives till that fatal day of July 20th, 1991. Along with Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the motivating power behind this book is this same personage. The existing emotional bondage makes this no easy task for me to attempt or accomplish, yet, with the blessings from Above, let me proceed.

The course of events of this glorious Temple was at times convoluted, at times smooth but never static. As ages unfolded, history stood by as a grateful onlooker to yet another tryst the Temple made with destiny. To the accompaniment of fire crackers and merriment of *Deepavali*, the fates laughed in glee as they bestowed on this Edifice of Divinity, a priceless jewel – a royal babe. *Chithira* the star signed its claim to everlasting fame with the birth of Rama Varma under its asterism. He came 12th in the line of sovereigns of Travancore starting with Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, who transferred full power of kingship through submission to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Sree Chithira Thirunal ranks as one among the most illustrious royal personalities, who ruled these sands in his dual capacity as *Dasa* and Ruler. He ruled as a Sage among Kings. Cheraman Perumal Bhaskara Ravi Varma III of 225 ME/1050 AD, by virtue of his abject devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, was regarded by all as an incarnation of Vishnu. Sree Chithira Thirunal of the immediate past seems to be the next person who was considered by many even during his life time as *Pratyaksha Padmanabha* or Padmanabha in visible form. With the passage of time this belief seems to grow in strength.



History documents his eventful and momentous life and career including the time of transition which reached the crossroads of change, moving on the undulating path of religious and temporal character of age-old tradition, to meet with and accept modern political change and then pass on, unruffled, into an insular orbit containing primarily only his service to his Master.

Since he had been blessed with the longest tenure of service to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, coupled with sweeping political changes, for purposes of better understanding, his period has been broadly classified into three time spans, as mentioned previously.

Few and far between are those who become historical figures in their life time. Circumstances saw to it that this distinction too searched him out.

The reforms of this illustrious ruler are so many that they would demand a volume to themselves. They mainly fall outside the scope of this work but one paragraph is being devoted to them.

Touching on the most significant contributions, as all-India firsts, are the Temple Entry Proclamation (which is taken up separately later on), the establishment of the first cement factory, adult franchise, the Periyar Game Sanctuary and abolition of death penalty (which was an all-Asia first). The prestigious Travancore University, Aerodrome, Radio Station, Aquarium, Sree Chitra Art Gallery, Land Mortgage Bank, Public Transport, Insurance and Public Health Departments, Public Service Commission, Debt Relief for Farmers, Pallivasal Hydro-electric Project, Electrification and Irrigation Schemes, the Medical College complex in Ulloor, the institutions for specialised educations like the Engineering College and development of the Ayurveda College, setting up of the Sree Swathi Thirunal Music Academy and Publications, the Labour Court and the Bicameral Legislature, remain as standing tributes to him. Entry into the Nair Brigade of the Travancore State Forces was made open to all. The impressive array of industries which dot the map of the land owe their birth to him. Compulsory free primary education, free water supply and Sree Chitra Destitute Home are products of his vision and heart. The world famous Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology and many Palace Charitable Trusts which continue to expend lakhs of rupees annually were established after the abolition of the Privy Purse from the personal income of the Maharaja and his mother, Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi.

Sree Chithira Thirunal was blessed with the presence of his mother, just fifteen years his senior, who was to be his guide and mentor at many times. Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan, of Travancore during the period 1110-1123 ME/1936-1947 AD, was an individual of acknowledged brilliance and his contributions to the all-round planned progress of the State cannot be underplayed. Yet in the Maharaja's historic words, "*In matters of conscience I consult nobody.*"



The devotion that filled and poured out in unchecked overflow from the heart of Sree Chithira Thirunal for his Sree Padmanabha Swamy is a well-known fact. Like many of the great uncles before him, he too seemed never satisfied with his services to the Master. It is doubtful if any sovereign had done so much in total perspective for the overall development of the Temple even when the latter part of his tenure as Chief Trustee of the Temple was in drastically changed circumstances. The first stage occurred when unlike his predecessors he had to see to the functioning of the Temple without the back – up of the State machinery and without State funding, utilising the major portion of his Privy Purse to meet its expenses. The second stage came when the Privy Purse was abolished on 31st December 1971. With that, while a huge portion of the income came to an abrupt end along with many other concessions, expenses spiralled up making it necessary for him to even sell many of his capital assets to find money for the mounting needs of the Temple. He created the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Trust<sup>371</sup> to back the Temple to whatever extent possible and the short falls, when they occurred, would somehow be made up from his own personal funds. Many may not have bestowed much thought on from where the finances came for the escalating expenditure of the Temple, let alone be aware of the Maharaja's personal material contributions for the same. In his three-fold capacity of 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa', as ruler and as an ordinary citizen, surmounting the many hurdles and difficulties of a period of transition, his role stands unique.

It is the special benediction of Sree Padmanabha Swamy that this Maharaja had the fortune of conducting maximum number of *Murajapams* and *Lakshadeepam* festivals. In terms of offerings too, his contributions, with special emphasis on the countless number made from his personal resources, were the maximum a single individual had made to the Temple, despite the changed circumstances.

## As Maharaja and Rajpramukh in the Service of the Temple

Since there are three different phases, distinct in character, connected to the Temple and Sree Chithira Thirunal, the following part of the chapter adheres to that pattern. The years when he was backed by the Government including the time when he had become the *Rajpramukh* instead of Maharaja, the period from 1107-1131 ME or 1931 to 1956 AD, offers itself for elaboration, first. Sree Chithira Thirunal formally took over the responsibilities of Temple and State administration in the literal sense in the month of *Thulam* from the Regent Maharani.

371. This Trust was made possible by Sri T.T. Krishnamachari, then Finance Minister of India, due to his personal appreciation and regard for Sree Chithira Thirunal. The 125 C Exemption relating to Income Tax too was given, which was then new to India.



The emotional bondage of ancient blood with Sree Padmanabha Swamy was deeply reflected in the young King. Among the many offerings poured at the feet of the Swamy over and above the routine submissions, were the gold plate to be placed under the bird lamp in the sanctum, and the gold *Deeparadhana Thattu* used for ritualistic worship. The gold rose-water sprinklers were increased to seven considering the concept of the *Saptha Sindhu Teertham*.<sup>372</sup> A full set of *Puja* vessels in gold were also made. The sacred and ancient coconut shell in which Villvamangalam made his initial offering to the Lord was again covered in gold for its preservation. *Kalastas* (pots) in gold were newly made. According to custom, as each Maharaja took charge, one food offering would be added. Sree Chithira Thirunal introduced a sweet *Nivedyam* in jaggery known as *Vatsan*.

The sturdy gold vessel for offering a special *Nivedyam* famous as *Retnappayasam* had to be remade. To the dismay of all, it broke twice in the final stages of completion. The officer-in-charge attended the early morning worship *Nirmalyam*, at the Temple for forty one consecutive days. Then the third attempt was made which proved to be a success. The well-known firm of jewellers, Vummidies, from Madras was got down for this job.

In 1108 ME/1933 AD, an incident causing dismay occurred. The first floor of the *Gopuram* (eastern tower) collapsed. Fortunately there was no loss of life or any other great damage done. The Maharaja immediately ordered a total renovation of the *Gopuram* so that no further calamities of this nature would occur. The renovation was carried out at the cost of rupees one lakh. A master craftsman by name Karuppaya Konar from Madurai was got down for this purpose along with twenty five assistants. The quality of the work turned out pleased the Maharaja so much that over and above the remuneration, he gifted Konar with a twisted bangle made of gold (മുറുക്കുവള). The delighted mason put the bangle on a silk cloth and placing it on his head went through the streets of the Fort in procession.<sup>373</sup>

A major disaster struck in 1110 ME/1934 AD on the 12th day in the month of *Thulam*, 28th of October, Sunday at 10 p.m., when a fire broke out in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple again, after the passage of many centuries. It is said that the broad corridor just outside the *Nalambalam* on the northern side was thatched. One of the workers had put a torch against a pillar of this corridor, the sparks from which set the thatch ablaze. The fire spread to the *Vilakku Madom* with rapidity; and the raging flames could be seen from very

372. *Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri the seven famous rivers of India well known for their sanctity.*

373. *Records show a similar instance when the then master craftsman was gifted with an 'Atta ihodu Vala' by Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma.*



far off. Panic ensued within the Temple and all around and immediate orders were issued by Sree Chithira Thirunal to allow the Englishman commanding the forces and men irrespective of religions to enter the Temple to control the fire. People from all back-grounds poured in to aid in the struggle with the flames. Sree Chithira Thirunal and his mother rushed to the Temple at once to personally supervise the operations.

In the meantime the priests of the Temple had already entered and were trying to break open the doors of the sanctum of Sree Narasimha Swamy so that the Idol could be removed. In like manner, other staff were also desperately toiling to take out to safety the many beautiful *Vahanas* used by the Deities for the procession, which were stored nearby. The fire was still raging in the outer areas at that time when an *Asareeri* (disembodied voice) was heard by them, "*Do not fear, the fire will not reach here.*" At the same time many had the great fortune of seeing a towering figure of Sree Hanuman Swamy, mace in hand, standing adjacent to His own big Idol. This vision provided them with the conviction that Sree Hanuman Swamy would control the fire. Though this incident has every chance of being delegated to the areas of oral tradition with the progress of time, as of today, there are people who are still alive who witnessed this miraculous manifestation.

By then the Maharaja and his mother had arrived. Fire control work was on in full swing. Like a lion licking its wounds in the privacy of its cave, the Maharaja too never favoured anyone witnessing his personal distress. However this time, in a rare display of public emotion, he was seen entering the Temple with tears streaming from his eyes. The Maharaja went straight to the *Bhadradeepappura* on the south side and stood in absolute silence there, immersed in prayer after making an offering to *Agni* (fire). When he finished his prayer, the fire had been regulated. True to the declaration of the disembodied voice and the vision of Hanuman Swamy, the flames had not spread beyond the *Belikkal* area where Hanuman stood and had left all the inner regions totally untouched. Those who had the privilege of knowing the Maharaja would not be surprised that the outbreak came under control coinciding with the conclusion of his prayer, the efficacy of it being such. It has to be additionally emphasized that unlike what had happened consequent to attack of fire in other temples where the *Sreekovils* too suffered damage, here neither the *Sreekovil* nor even one among the other consecrations was touched by the fury of the flames. People were convinced that it was the power of the Maharaja's prayer that had brought about this amazing turn of events.

The next month itself, renovation work was started. The inscription on the right side immediately outside the *Nalambalam* entrance on the north reads that, as ordered by Sree Chithira Thirunal Maharaja, the renovation was started



on the *Pooyam* day in the Year 1110 ME in the month of *Vrischikom* which corresponds to November/December 1934 AD.

നാകികാമ്യേത്ര കോളംബേ  
 വൃശ്ചികേ പുഷ്യവാസരേ  
 ജീർണ്ണോദ്ധാരണമാരബ്ധം  
 ശ്രീ ചിത്രക്ഷിതിപാജ്ഞയാ <sup>374</sup>

The renovation was carried out with the greatest care. The thatched portion was promptly replaced with metal sheets. Mandatory purificatory rites were conducted by the Tarananalloor Tantries.

Two years hence came the epoch-making event of the Maharaja's religious and political life, the *Kshetra Praveshana Vilambaram* or The Temple Entry Proclamation of 1112 ME/1936 AD. Its significance being so great, it is being dealt with here separately under a sub-title.

## THE TEMPLE ENTRY PROCLAMATION

### PROCLAMATION

#### BY

HIS HIGHNESS SRI PADMANABHA DASA VANCHI PALA SIR RAMA VARMA KULASEKHARA KIRITAPATI MANNEY SULTAN MAHARAJA RAJA RAMARAJA BAHADUR SHAMSHER JUNG, KNIGHT GRAND COMMANDER OF THE MOST EMINENT ORDER OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE, MAHARAJA OF TRAVANCORE, ISSUED UNDER DATE THE 27<sup>TH</sup> THULAM 1112 CORRESPONDING TO THE 12<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1936.

Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of Our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on an all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has, throughout the centuries, adapted itself to the needs of changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth, or caste or community, be denied the consolations and solace of the Hindu faith, We have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by Us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at the temples controlled by Us and Our Government.

#### SIGN MANUAL

This Proclamation issued on the eve of his twenty fourth birthday has been considered by evaluators as the most socially progressive and religiously liberal

374. നാകികാമ്യേ, according to the *Akshara Sankhya System*, gives the number 1110 which marks the Malayalam year in which the renovation took place.



ordinance enacted in India. It was a revolutionary and courageous action initiated for the first time in the country towards the eradication of untouchability. The rest of India followed in his footsteps very many years later and in certain areas even today, though the legal sanction exists, practical application is absent. The grateful people of this land continue to remember and honour this day of fortune and its architect the Maharaja. In emotion-choked voices the older generations of people, subjected to a long tradition which had denied them approach and access to the temples, recollect the moments of salvation as they crossed the threshold and entered the till then forbidden spheres of sanctity.

This Proclamation won all-India fame for the young Ruler who had promulgated it facing extreme ire from certain powerful sections of society. Some leaders declared their complete dissociation with the temples coming within the orbit of the State. This posed a grave issue on many counts but the Maharaja stood firm and facing the crisis made the best alternate arrangements within his command. At every stage of this vital issue he had the wise counsel and full support of his mother Maharani, Setu Parvathi Bayi and his Dewan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer.

Lavish appreciation poured in from all parts of India. Mahatma Gandhi, who described the act as a "Marvel of Modern India", hailed Sree Chithira Thirunal as 'Modern Ashoka' and declared, *"I verily believe that when all else about Travancore is forgotten, this one act of the Maharaja, the Proclamation, will be remembered in future."*<sup>375</sup>

The 'Thrippati Danam' of Marthanda Varma the Great, and the 'Kshetra Praveshana Vilambaram' of the great Sree Chithira Thirunal, both made history and stand out by themselves as lasting tributes to the vastness of heart and sublimity of conception of those who visualised them.

Decades later the Government of India posthumously honoured this eminent personality with a commemoration stamp. This was released on the eve of his 79th Birthday and the 55th anniversary of the Proclamation.



375. During the Regency, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Thiruvananthapuram he asked the young King if he would open the Temples to Harijans when he assumed power. Without any hesitation came the reply, *"I will throw open the doors of the temples to all Hindus". He kept his words.*



The Maharaja's interest continued unabated in the betterment of the Temple despite his earnest commitments to the matters of the State. In varying years starting with 1117 ME/1942 AD, and reaching up to 1133 ME/1958 AD, all the *Vahanas* of the three Deities were completely redone. It was no simple matter. The required gold was supplied from the Palace resources.

In 1945 Sree Chithira Thirunal introduced an offering for Sree Hanuman which has steadily gained in popularity in the succeeding years. It was customary to offer butter at the feet and hands of this Idol. The Maharaja made the *Muzhukkappu* (മുഴുക്കാപ്പു) offering to the Idol by which the entire body and face were covered in butter. He did it for the safe recovery of his mother from ill health. Thereafter the fame of Hanuman's curative powers greatly increased.

It must be remembered that Travancore had all along been ruled by an unbroken line of Hindu kings and had retained down the centuries its essential character of a Hindu State though religious tolerance of a great degree existed.<sup>376</sup> The most important Temple in Travancore State had all along been the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by virtue of which, even when the political capital was elsewhere, Thiruvananthapuram was the established religious capital. It was richly endowed and possessed extensive landed properties. The 18th century saw the end of the rule of the *Yogam* and the Temple properties intermingled with those of the State, with Sree Padmanabha Swamy being accepted as the Supreme Sovereign. Yet, the State funding of the Temple and of its religious ceremonies continued till the integration of Travancore-Cochin.

In 1946 Sree Chithira Thirunal issued a decree which fixed the amount payable annually from the State to the temples at rupees twenty five lakhs with provision for further payments if required. In 1948, just before the end of monarchy, another decree was enacted by the Maharaja fixing rupees fifty lakhs as yearly payment to maintain the Temples in the State in addition to rupees one lakh which was to be paid to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple separately. Hindu opinion was adamant that the State should be responsible for contributing appropriately towards the temples as they lost their lands through land reforms. Many temples have suffered grievously because of this take over. The State-owned temples were to come under the newly constituted *Devaswom* Board with the exception of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which owned the State.

By now sweeping changes had set in and monarchy was to be abolished with popular governments coming into power. The administration of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was a major issue. The Maharaja was firm in his resolve that the Temple's position should not be affected in any way, whatever

376. Refer 'The Story of the Integration of the Indian States' V.P. Menon - Chapter XIV Travancore - Cochin Pages 283, 284.



be the effect of the changes on him personally. He also refused to accept any special recognition for himself if it was not extended to the Temple. The fact that he declined to continue having the military guard at the Palace if the same was not available to the Temple also is an example in point. It was finally agreed that the administration of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple would be conducted under the direct control and supervision of the Maharaja who was its Chief Trustee through an Executive Officer to be appointed by him. Suits by or against this Temple were to be instituted in the name of the Executive Officer. This formed Clause 'B' of Article VIII of the Covenant entered into by the Rulers of Travancore and Cochin for the formation of the United State of Travancore and Cochin. Clause 'A' of the same Article spelt out the obligation of the State to pay through the Devaswom Board Rs. one lakh to the Executive Officer of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and Rs. Fifty lakhs to the other Temples against the lands that were taken away from them. Clause 'C' of this Article stated that out of the Rs. fifty lakhs paid to the Devaswom Board by the State, other than the prior mentioned Rs. one lakh, another Rupees five lacs be paid to meet the expenditure of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, (It must be remembered that it was this Temple that lost most heavily when it was deprived of its lands as its holdings were so extensive). This payment continues to be remitted. The Covenant came into force on 1st July 1949.

The Government of India had offered to install Maharaja Chithira Thirunal as *Rajapramukh* for life of the United State of Travancore and Cochin. Sree Chithira Thirunal's paramount dedication to Sree Padmanabha Swamy again surfaced on a vital and highly sensitive issue. During his visit to Delhi he informed the powers that be, that on account of the dedication of the State to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the special loyalty and devotion which the rulers of Travancore owed to the Deity, it would not be possible for him to take the usual oath of Office as *Rajapramukh*.<sup>377</sup> His only Master to whom he already stood committed was Sree Padmanabha Swamy. This would have meant that he was virtually signing off the life-long position of power, holistic security and comfort as the head of the new United State but the Maharaja was not prepared to compromise on an issue so vital to him.

V.P. Menon arrived in Trivandrum in May 1949 to try and settle matters with Sree Chithira Thirunal. The inability of Sree Chithira Thirunal to take the oath of Office as Head of the State was the big hurdle. In V.P. Menon's words, "*The devotion of the present Maharaja to Sree Padmanabha borders on to fanaticism, he rules the State not as its head but as a servant of the tutelary Deity*", Finally a solution was found by which Sree Chithira Thirunal would address a letter to V.P. Menon giving a solemn assurance (not oath) to the

377. V.P. Menon – *'The story of the Integration of the Indian States'* – Chapter XIV Page 280.



Indian Government that he would do his best to protect, preserve and defend the United State of Travancore and Cochin. This was indeed a new precedent even in world democratic history. The letter was read out by the Chief Justice in the presence of the Maharaja at the time of the inauguration of the Union in 1949 itself. With this year the era in transition started its turbulent course.

The officer in charge of the Temple administration had for a very long time been designated as the *Mahilakam Karyakkar*. Though the Covenant had spelt out change in the term to Executive Officer, in actual practice this transformation of nomenclature came only very much later, in 1961. In the ensuing years, even with the change in character of the traditional role of the Temple and in its financial super structure, the Maharaja in his position as *Rajpramukh* was able to more or less maintain the same parameters as before. The last *Murajapam* to be conducted on the traditional lavish scale was the one of 1129 ME/1954 AD. Great changes had come to pass by the time of the next *Murajapam*. In 1225 ME/1950 AD Sree Chithira Thirunal ceased to be the *Rajpramukh* by decree of the Indian Government and India became a Republic.

## The end of the Old Order

With the old order of things, giving place to the new, making the supportive backing of the infrastructure of the State progressively remote, the Maharaja had necessarily to depend on and implement his major decisions through the Executive Officer of the Temple appointed by him whose place in the pattern of things assumed greater importance. As such, for the sake of continuity and convenience, the time slots in which they operated are being partially demarcated, making them form the backdrop of the future events and turns of fortune.

The Maharaja<sup>378</sup> redesignated Sree M.H. Krishna Iyer, who was the last administrator of the old system as well, as the first Executive Officer of the Temple, a post he held from 1961 to 1968. (1136-1145 ME). Many noteworthy steps were taken during this time.

A great service rendered not only to the Temple but to the State history itself was the partial sorting and indexing of the piles of precious cadjan records, a task with which Sree Chithira Thirunal was most concerned. Due to the formidable number and lack of experts among other reasons, only a portion of the work could be carried out.

The *Kulasekhara Mandapam* is rich in the beauty and artistry of its array of sculptures. It goes to the credit of Krishna Iyer that the *Dhyana Sloka* (descriptive verse) of the main deity of each pillar was unearthed and compiled together.

378. *Even though monarchy was officially abolished Sree Chithira Thirunal remained as the Maharaja all his life in the eyes of the people.*



The British System of Measurement was abandoned in favour of the Metric System. Vessels kept in the store rooms which were found redundant were sold in auction.

The winds of change which were to strike with great force later on had already started to make themselves felt. By nature Sree Chithira Thirunal, who was generally liberal minded, was resistant to change unless convinced of its need, when it came to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Deviation from established norms was not favoured by him and when it involved reduction in practices traditionally adhered to, the reaction was traumatic and distressing for him. Many such events occurred, during Krishna Iyer's tenure, inevitable though they were.

The Temple was the owner of vast acres of land and from olden days those to whom they were entrusted would give the fixed quantity of paddy to the Temple in return for the favour of allowing them to be the tenants. The huge quantity of rice needed daily was met thus. With the advent of land reforms, the whole system underwent a total reversal. The Kerala and Madras Governments decided to make lumpsum payments to compensate the loss of paddy which they were stopping. The *Nel-pura*, where grain was stored, and its affiliated establishments had to be closed.

Due to mounting expenditure, the *Goshala* where the cows and calves and bulls were maintained for the needs of the Temple, was wound up. The cattle were auctioned and workers absorbed into the ranks of the Temple. Later on, this place was converted into what is today the *Ramanamatham Kalyana Mandapam* (wedding complex). This was the first of the many *Kalyana Mandapas* owned by the Temple, converted from their original functions, with the view to utilise them to generate income for the Temple. Another step in this direction was the conversion of the area outside the northern guard room into shops to be given on rent.

A welcome innovation was to allow the general public to enter the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple through the imposing *Natakashala Mukhappu*, which had not been previously permitted. Sree Chithira Thirunal gave sanction to the people to perform the offering known as *Thulabharam*, which was exclusively a royal privilege, but this was done first only some years hence, in 1972. (Krishna Iyer's six month old grandson was the first outsider for whom this offering was performed with ten kilos of jaggery.)

Two *Kathakali* sets used to perform at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple during the festival. It was found necessary to discontinue the troupe that performed outside the Temple while the one that performed inside was retained.



Review of the routine procedure of the Temple became unavoidable. Edible oil used for lighting of the large number of lamps had become very expensive and in short supply. Edible oil was not permitted for lighting of the lamps thenceforth. The wages for the many lamp-lighters imposed a heavy burden. On many counts the need for electrification of the Temple became inevitable. The proposal was presented to the Maharaja by the Executive Officer but he was much against it. Finally he agreed to a *Devaprasnam*<sup>379</sup> being conducted for the first time ever in the history of this Temple, which proved extremely favourable to the proposition. Even this did not win a complete sanction from him. All he agreed to was to install a few lights in the *Natakashala* and lighting up the outside arch with electric bulbs.

Though orthodox in matters inside the temple, Sree Chithira Thirunal was otherwise progressive and ready to experiment if it were for the general good. A *Mathilakam* Co-operative Society was formed for the employees and a store was opened nearby.

This period was also exposed to the organisation of the workforce into unions and much labour unrest leading to strikes. This political activity which would erupt off and on was most unfortunate in a place of worship and continued sporadically for many years. Even at the zenith of agitation, the one action that the employees never resorted to was obstruction of the rituals or their suspension.

It was in this climate of uncertainty and disquiet that, according to Sree Chithira Thirunal's, desire Lt. Col. A.P. Kanthy took over as the next Executive Officer. He had the distinction of being the first non-Brahmin to occupy the seat of executive control of the Temple for a lengthy period of nine years from 1143 to 1152 ME/1968 to 1977 AD. He was the first officer to start reporting directly to the Maharaja without involving his counter part-in the Palace (*Chellamvakai Karyakkar*, later designated as the Private Secretary) as the transmitting medium, thus making the administration more autonomous.

Due to many reasons the hereditary functions had become diluted and started to slip away from those who had till then been responsible for them. Where great digressions were noticed, many such posts ceased to be hereditary. This was accomplished without creating a negative effect on the functioning of the Temple.

Some years ago, as mentioned earlier, the *Devaprasnam* had revealed that electrification of the Temple could be carried out. Due to the extreme reluctance on the part of the Maharaja, only the minimum changes had been adopted. As

---

379. *Deva Prasnam* – an astrological method to obtain the consent or otherwise of the Deity on any matter.



the days went by the high quality coconut oil used for lighting the multitude of lamps had been abandoned due to the prohibitive price and ban on its use for purposes other than consumption and replaced with gingelly oil. This had also become expensive and the labour involved was enormous. The Maharaja was much against the use of electricity but, supported by the readings of the astrologers and faced with the practical problems, he was finally persuaded by Col. Kanthy to give his assent to this inevitable change. All the same time, he was adamant that the electrification should not infiltrate beyond a certain point. As such, the inner areas were left untouched as is seen at present also while the major portion of the Temple adopted electricity though with regret. This coincided with the *Lakshadeepam* festival of 1972 which was the first to be conducted with electric light. Before the festival, the Maharaja donated a bit of land to be utilised to put up a transformer for the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The Electricity Board put it up free of cost in return for the availability of land and the current obtained from it went not to meet the needs of the Temple alone but to supply electricity to the Fort area as well.

## Triumph of Devotion

It has to be stressed here that at mid night on the 31st of December 1971, the Indian Government passed yet another enactment abolishing the Privy Purses promised to the Ex-Rulers. With one stroke, Sree Chithira Thirunal lost eighteen lakhs rupees annually. A major part of this amount was being used by him to keep the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy functioning in the same manner as before without any reduction anywhere. This event, however, cut off the one solid source of money available from his personal resources. Faced with very real financial difficulty, with much trauma and distress, he was compelled to take measures in consultation with his Executive Officer, to overcome the situation in the best way possible. It was inevitable that major changes had to be incorporated and the entire system underwent a thorough revision. At the same time great care was taken to see that the basic and the fundamental procedure remained intact. On personal knowledge it is added here that even in these vastly changed circumstances, Sree Chithira Thirunal *Valia Thampuran*<sup>380</sup> would sell his personal assets to honour the requirements of the Temple.

The restructuring of the existing age-old establishments and systems was of course a sensitive and laborious task calling for careful handling of situations which could have become explosive.

The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple had all along commanded the top position with regard to the quantum of free feeding. *Annadanam* (food being distributed as gift) had been upheld as an act of great virtue from time

---

380. *Valia Thampuran* is the title enjoyed by the seniormost male member of each Kshatriya family in Kerala.



immemorial. With change in circumstances it became progressively more and more difficult to continue the practice at the same tempo. The special food distribution to hundred and one Namboodiries over and above the routine feeding, which was carried out on the *Thiru Onam* day of every month, also became a problem. Following the land reforms which had very adversely affected this function of the Temple, coupled with severe financial constraint in the wake of the changing political horizon, large scale Brahmin feeding came to a halt. Likewise the quantum wise reduction of routine offerings had to be accepted as there was no other alternative available. They were initially reduced to half the original quantity and later on to one eighth after in-depth consultations with the Tantries. Monthly offerings too were cut down quantity-wise and minor reductions were effected in the annual offerings. While introducing unavoidable economy measures, no rites or practices were stopped, nor was the quality compromised, the change being in the quantum alone.

Before Independence, the paddy required in huge bulk for the *Nivedyas* and other needs of the Temple came from the Temple lands situated in the Nanjinad area. In 1946, a year prior to the Independence of India, the situation was as detailed hereafter. The then annual *Pattam* (lease amount) from the Temple properties in Nanjinad in former Travancore amounted to ninety nine thousand *paras* of paddy equivalent to twenty one thousand rupees in cash while the properties in Trivandrum District returned an annual *Pattam* of thirty three thousand *paras* of Paddy corresponding to ten thousand rupees. For collection of the dues the *Sanketham Kacheri* (office) in Thakkala and the *Melkamkanam* office in Thiruvananthapuram functioned. In the wake of land legislation, the fields were lost to the Temple but the two concerned Governments remitted money instead of paddy and paddy was purchased from these funds from the self same lands. With the holdings becoming smaller after being transferred to individual owners who were its past tenants, it became impossible for the supply available to satisfy the demand. Paddy was then being brought from Thanjavoor and Kumbhakonam in Tamil Nadu through contractors. The main financing came from Tamil Nadu where the Temple had been a land lord of great standing, while the local Government paid less than its proportionate quantity. The shortfall, if any, was made up by the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Trust. With the surrender of *Pattam* rights to the two Governments of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in 1146 ME/1971 AD they in turn remitted an annuity of one lakh thirty two thousand rupees and eight thousand five hundred rupees respectively over and above the six lakh rupees routed through the Devaswom Board.

Before the changes came, the Temple had many kitchens earmarked for different types of cooking. Two kitchens were used for cooking ninety two *paras* of rice daily, out of which forty two *paras* were used for the *Nivedyas*



and the rest for feeding the Brahmins thrice a day. Many Brahmins who have made their mark on the national map as scientists, legal luminaries, scholars and administrators have the rice of this Temple in their blood.

When the quantities had to be drastically cut down due to reasons already mentioned which were mainly financial in character, and as the amounts coming from the Governments became insufficient to cover the rising costs, the amount of paddy purchased also dropped. Consequently the age-old institutions like the *Chottu-pura*, *Nel-pura* and *Ural-pura* operated by the Madathil Pillais and directly related to feeding and storing of paddy, pounding of rice and storing it, were necessarily closed down. This naturally evoked much opposition from the displaced workforce, whose retrenchment was an inevitable economy measure. Finally a compromise was arrived at and compensation paid to the Madathil Pillais in cash. Rice is now bought and stored inside the Temple itself, the storing facility being sufficient for the much reduced quantity of the present times.

Another kitchen was exclusively reserved for the preparation of the *Palppayasam* (milk pudding) offering. Before the changes, hundred and fifty litres of milk was used just for this offering and the whole quantity distributed free. The winding up of the cowshed with a strength of sixty head of cattle has already been mentioned.

After the *Thrippati Danam* of Marthanda Varma in the Seventeen Hundreds, financial participation of the public in the Temple matters was not seen in any significant measure as it was not necessary due to the fact that officially Sree Padmanabha Swamy had become the sole owner, of the entire State. As such outside offerings, (offerings other than those pouring in from the Royal Family) were not popular with the Temple and were not encouraged. The few that came would go as extra, over and above the daily offerings to which they made no difference. This point of view was evident even during the time of Sree Chithira Thirunal for quite some time when the finances were found from the Temple itself, from the Temple Trust and as the last resort, from the Maharaja's personal income. This became most difficult when the Privy Purse was stopped. Chances for public participation in worship and offerings had been something which Sree Chithira Thirunal felt should be made available. The Executive Officer also had the same line of thought and in a swing of outlook the Temple was opened up to an extent, for the financial participation of the people. All existing offerings including *Thulabharam* offering were made available to the public and time for public entry and worship extended and made more elastic. Such measures augmented the inflow of money into the collection boxes. These boxes which used to be opened annually started being opened once in three months.



Auctioning of balance *Nivedyam* was partially stopped and made available for the devotees to purchase from the Temple itself. A special offering of raisin and sugar candy to be offered to the Lord and taken away by the devotees was newly instituted. Endowments of permanent character existed in a limited way but the same being liberalised, such permanent endowments to the Temple increased greatly.

The *Kulasekhara Mandapam* was opened for public viewing. It was made possible for members of the public to obtain *Ona Villu* for submitting it as an offering. The Temple authorities would have to be given the application for the same, well in advance. The *Villu* could only be obtained through the Temple. One condition was that this offering could be made on the *Thiru Onam* day of the month of *Chingom* alone. The demand for the *Villu* is on the increase every year.

The view that the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was totally the private property of the Royal House wherein public involvement was discouraged, underwent a drastic change following all these steps.

Even in the time of the former Executive Officer Krishna Iyer, the cowshed had been modified and made into a wedding complex. This building was further altered and made to accommodate *Ramanamatham* and *Sudarsana Kalyana Mandapas* on the ground floor and *Mahalakshmi Kalyana Mandapam* on the first floor. The building in which the vessels of the Temple were stored was also converted into two *Kalyana Mandapas*. With decreasing domestic conveniences and residences with restricted grounds coming into being, these *Kalyana Mandapas* became very popular and a steady source of income. Other unused buildings were converted into lodges for the pilgrims.

A serious situation surfaced when the armed police of the State who were on guard duty at the outer gates were withdrawn at a very short notice of a couple of days following the abolition of privileges by the Indian Government in the year 1972. Their presence had been a great moral strength especially as they had the backing of the law. They had come as successors to the military guards of the old Travancore State Forces who ceased to be available with the Integration of States. The Temple was faced with the weighty and total responsibility of providing immediate, effective security to replace them. With the permission of the *Valia Thampuran* (Sree Chithira Thirunal) Col. Kanthy organised the existing internal security guards of the Temple who had all along been doing the twenty four hours duty inside and who were made up of ex-service men only, to act as external guards as well. The required number was delegated to guard the outer gates in rotation and the deficit created thus was made up by absorbing the excess workmen available on the pay-roll who were trained and entrusted with guard duty inside. This surplus had been created as, with electrification, the lamp lighters had no real duties. With this action their



services were re-utilised without additional drain on the Temple treasury. Since the Temple guards were unarmed except for their short sticks, barred iron gates were immediately fabricated and fixed at the entrances to the Temple. The stress and strain of satisfactory re-organisation in so short a time was considerable. With the passing days, the exclusively ex-servicemen Temple guards became diluted in character with more and more civilians being absorbed into their rank and file.

Col. Kanthy, who was a Nair, was the first non-Brahmin to occupy the post. As such certain deviations were introduced. Sree Chithira Thirunal granted permission to Nairs and other officers to walk in front of the procession with Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Till then they had walked behind the procession. It was necessary for the smooth conduct of the processions that the Executive Officer be at the helm of affairs. This permission was extended to others as well. Likewise directions were issued that the *Prasadam* be given to the hands of the Nairs and others instead of being left at a place from where they could take it. Till then they were not permitted to receive them directly from the priests. It was customary for Brahmins to be served the *Valia Payasam Nivedyam* inside the *Sivelippura*. Non-Brahmins were also now accorded the same privilege and were served this offering though in another part of the vast corridors, so as not to offend the sentiments of anyone. These were all fundamental social changes.

The Ganapathy in the vast kitchen-areas used for public feeding — the Agrashala Ganapathy — had always enjoyed a prominent position. When the kitchens were finally closed with the turn of fortunes, this Ganapathy who is sculpted on to the inner side of the eastern boundary wall, came into His own. A separate shrine was made for Him and worship done. He continues to be quite a favourite of the devotees.

Though retrenchment had become a necessity, by and large the reduction in the workforce was brought about without heartburn and was made by voluntary retirement on attractive terms. This could be considered as the original of what is the much publicised 'golden handshake' of today's labour climate. Privileges in kind, mainly rice, were converted into cash which was a fixed amount and not a variable factor like commodities.

Another significant change recorded is that many of the arts fell into disuse due to the paucity of funds and non-availability of the traditional artistes who used to render free service and perform during the festivals of the Temple in return for the lands gifted to them by the Temple or the rulers of yore. The descendants have in many cases ceased to be the owners of these lands following transfer of titles or occupation rights and some have branched off into other professions and activities. Since it was not possible to enhance the financial



burden by paying for these art forms and getting them from elsewhere, many of the *Arangams* (performing arts) unfortunately ceased to be. The same situation is applicable to certain other traditional services rendered to the Temple and those which could not be dispensed with, were changed in nature to become paid ones.

Certain adjustments were made with regard to the top ranks of the priestly order. Because the traditional bathing area on the beach was seen becoming more and more unsuitable due to misuse, a separate pond was made for the Tantries to bathe inside the Beach Palace compound. The system of giving extension of tenure to the chief priests – Periya Nambi and Panchagavyatu Nambi was introduced as a policy matter.

General administration was toned up and as part of it, for the sake of administrative convenience and control, the Treasurer's office functioning inside the Temple premises was shifted to the office of the Executive Officer. Terraced or covered corridors were put up connecting the *Sivelippuras* to the inner regions so that the devotees could move about without being exposed to the vagaries of weather. Laying of granite flooring and other renovations were done in a phased manner. A beautiful new top covering for the *Sivelippura* was made.

The system of purchase of milk, which had become a necessity following the winding up of the cowsheds, was changed. Milk used to be brought to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple daily by 3.00 a.m. from the families who had been supplying it as an honoured precedent for some years now. It was a sight worth seeing when the long formation of people lined up, gleaming vessels in hand at the Temple gate, in the early morning hours. Though they provided the milk against payment, this practice had to be ultimately done away with following the difficulties in ensuring quality and purity of the milk, keeping a priceline and enforcing discipline to check erratic supply. Only for the milk needed for daily *Abhishekam*, were cows brought to the Temple and milked there.

This eventful period had its share of political unrest triggered by the labour situation which had become active during the time of Krishna Iyer. All shades of political opinion were represented in the Temple unions with outsiders at the helm. The Maharaja, who was the Chief Trustee, was by practice insulated from the union movement directly, as all discussions and dialogues were with his representative, the Executive Officer, who would in turn submit the needs and demands of the unions and transmit the Maharaja's decisions to them. In the time of Col. Kanthy, in accordance with the repeated wishes of the leaders, the Maharaja, in the presence of the Executive Officer, met the leaders in the Palace, breaking established customs. This demand was not thereafter ever raised by them.



Strikes and agitation ran their course but one particular point to be underlined is that apart from the fact that the religious rites and discharge of individual duties were never affected and the *Valia Thampuran* was not even once prevented from going for his daily worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy or participating in the obligatory rituals. This was proof of the underlying sentiments that the work-force cherished for him.

Certain acts which were of advantage to the general public were also carried out during these years. With the view that the image of Sree Padmanabha Swamy should be retained within the mind and that any transfer of the same to a solid medium would not do justice to His glory, the representation of the Lord in pictures was not available in the market. Finally the picture appeared due to constant demand from the devotees for the same. It was drawn with considerable difficulty as sketching was not permitted in front of the Idol. A little booklet each in Malayalam, English, Hindi and Tamil regarding the legends of the Temple was brought out. Another comprehensive book on the rituals and customs of the Temple was published in Malayalam. Though originally intended for the use of the Temple, it is now on sale. Another convenience introduced for the public, especially for the vast influx of visiting pilgrims, was the service of licensed guides.

The action – packed and challenging nine years up to 1977 were momentous indeed, when Sree Chithira Thirunal with the full and able backing of Col. A.P. Kanthy carried out a thorough revision of the system. While many steps were inevitable due to circumstances beyond his control, it was with distress and unwillingness that he accepted them. The new guidelines were so detailed and exhaustive that no fresh input was required for quite some time.

After Col. A.P. Kanthy relinquished office the Maharaja's choice fell on Major K.S. Thampi, who served in the capacity of Executive Officer from 1977 to 1980. The next *Lakshadeepam* festival fell within this period. The *Valia Thampuran's* driving desire to ensure that no lacuna should be created in Temple matters and his exceptional foresight had often prompted him on to anticipatory action. Perhaps seeing the shadows of approaching events, he had constituted a special fund for the conduct of the *Lakshadeepam*. With State resources drying up, this was a real boon. Routine repairs wherever called for were carried out like the ones done on the roof of *Sivelippura* and on the richly worked *Melkkettu* (cloth canopy). The Eastern *Gopuram* was thoroughly cleaned. The public was allowed to go inside it and also into the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* on the purchase of entrance tickets carrying a nominal fee. The one focal point of disruption, however, continued in the form of the politically motivated agitations of the workers.



The Maharaja would never countenance waste in the Temple. He himself was the best example he could offer to his people who staffed the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. A fact of great traditional value which not many people think about or realise is recorded here though the background of time should be ideally before 1956 or even 1949.

Sree Chithira Thirunal was Spartan in the extreme simplicity of his personal life style. He is the only ruler who did not perform the *Thulapurusha Danam* and the *Hiranyagarbham*. Though he became the ruler at the young age of twelve, the real assumption of power came seven years later. It has been mentioned earlier, when dealing with modern history, that after the *Thrippati Danam* of Marthanda Varma with whom the modern age has commenced, the rulers of Travancore never had a coronation as they were the *Dasas* and not the actual kings – the crown was placed on their heads just once after the conduct of these two elaborate rituals. Sree Chithira Thirunal put off doing these rituals immediately on taking over the reins of Government even though he could have easily done so, as they involved a tremendous expenditure of twenty eight lakh rupees which he felt he could not ask the State to incur on his behalf. As the days went by the situation worsened and he totally abandoned the idea of conducting them.

As per the directions of the *Valia Thampuran*, Lt. Col. G.T. Thampi took over as the next Executive Officer for the period 1155-1160ME/1980-1985AD. In that same year the best *Kalyana Mandapam*, controlled directly by the Temple, by name *Panchajanyam Kalyana Mandapam* came into being. This was a real money-spinner for the Temple. The old *Nel-pura* which is a gem of typical Kerala architecture, has been preserved and converted as the dining area of this wedding complex.

With rising inflation everywhere, the Maharaja and his officer were ever concerned in augmenting the inflow of finances to the Temple. A welcome offering was introduced for the first time in the form of one whole day's *Puja* wherein the expenses for the entire day's *Puja* would be met by the devotee. This is gaining popularity. Even though public offerings were accepted, those involving perishable commodities would be received as an addition to the existing quantum and not as subsidisation. That attitude underwent a change with this big offering and the money contribution started being used to offset the routine quantities required. Col. Thampi being interested in history was able to make notes of many of the unusual but little known aspects of the Temple. Sketching of the outstanding sculptures was undertaken but had to be abandoned following financial strungency. (This has been taken up at the present stage). The first floor of the Eastern *Gopuram* was converted into a museum. Figures from the *Mahabharatham* are also depicted there. The Omana Kunjamma Commission was instituted during this time.



Sree Chithira Thirunal appointed Sri N.S. Nair to succeed Col. G.T. Thampi. His tenure of service was from 1160-1164 ME/1985-1989 AD. The recommendations of the Omana Kunjamma Commission were executed in this period. This had much impact on labour-related issues like re-organisation of the entire establishment by reducing the staff strength, revising the salary structure, fixing working hours and, most significant, entering into a long-term agreement with the unions. With this the labour climate in the Temple settled down. At the same time discipline was tightened and stern action taken for misconduct. It was around 1985 that the *Ashtabandha Kalasam* was again done as per directives of the Tantries in the Thiru Ampati Krishna Temple for the Idol. The Tantries performed the rites and rituals for the same.

In collaboration with the District Collector Sri T. Balakrishnan I.A.S., preliminary arrangements were made for the cleaning up of the Temple tank and the areas around it. The Maharaja was deeply interested in getting this done, more so because of the age-old sanctity attached to it. The Panchajanyam *Kalyana Mandapam* and the roof of the front portions of the Eastern *Gopuram* were renovated and repaired. Plans were set going for construction of a dormitory and guest house for the pilgrims. Measures were adopted to augment the income of the Temple by increasing the rent, auctioning unwanted articles and so on.

Inventories were also updated. Partial repair of murals was carried out. Sree Mithranandapuram had all along very close links with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. A portion of the property fell into the hands of outsiders. The Executive Officer was successful in redeeming it and getting compound walls constructed around it.

A noteworthy step which had the full approval of the *Valia Thampuran* was the induction of certain banks for counting the collections from the *Hundies* (collection boxes) thereby blocking the chances of pilferage.

The starting of the Sree Swathi Thirunal Jayanthi Celebrations with the rendering of his compositions vocally and on the instruments in the Temple also came into being. This has become an ongoing custom and takes place in the *Natakashala Mukhappu* every year.

The Maharaja was pleased to entrust Col. K. Gopinathan Nayar with the post of the Executive Officer in 1164 ME/1989 AD. He continues to hold this office as this book goes into print. Apart from the fact that this period has witnessed many events of utmost importance to the Temple, it was also destined to bear the agony and trauma marking the end of a great era. This will be explained in detail later.

Sree Chithira Thirunal's deep emotional devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, which is famous, grew deeper and all absorbing with each day. It



became an almost sublime obsession. One would not be guilty of exaggeration if it were declared that he lived and breathed in his Swamy. During his waking hours, when sitting by himself, he would repeat aloud 'Sree Padmanabha Swamy'. Even in his sleep he has been heard uttering this same sacred name by those around him including the author. Though he was getting physically frail, till the very end he would walk bare-footed, bare-chested and with the heavy four and a half kilogram sword held erect in hand, the four-odd kilometres to the beach in the *Arat* procession, in unflinching dedication. His belief and faith in Sree Padmanabha Swamy as his Guardian never wavered.<sup>381</sup>

The Temple experienced a whole spate of activity in the succeeding years starting with an auspicious new offering. In 1164 ME/1989 AD an eternal lamp was lit by Princess Pooyam Thirunal Gouri Parvathi Bayi, Sree Chithira Thirunal's niece. Devotees are free to offer oil for the same. The two original eternal lamps flanking the area demarcating the sacred feet of the Lord had been burning for unnumbered years and were maintained exclusively by the Temple. *Murajapam* preceding the *Lakshadeepam* festival commenced this year, marking yet another milestone in the Temple's history.

A beautiful offering presenting a grand visual was the *Nira Vilakku* introduced in 1990 by which a great number of oil lamps including the *Kavara Vilakku* inside the *Nalambalam* area were all lit giving the appearance of *Swargam* (Heaven). This innovation pleased the Maharaja very much and was one of his favourite offerings. Being a child of light himself (as he was born on *Deepavali* day), decorations and displays of lighted lamps had special enchantment for him. These offerings of lighting of lamps complemented nicely the grand *Lakshadeepam* of mid January 1990, the last one to take place during Sree Chithira Thirunal's service to his Lord. (Prompted by his utmost satisfaction at the conduct of this grand festival, for once deviating from set precedent, he conveyed his appreciation to the Executive Officer, in the *Sivelippura* itself).

381. It may not be out of place here to illustrate the Maharaja's faith with a few instances. One *Arat* was at a time when a national disaster had struck and the whole country was in uproar, with emotions running high; While permission was obtained from the Government to conduct the procession, he was advised to join the Deities at the beach and not walk along with them as was the custom, as the chances of some unexpected trouble could not be ruled out. His reply was, "No one need come with me during the procession, those who wish can join at the beach. I will accompany Sree Padmanabha Swamy as usual. This much I am sure of – not even a grain of sand will be thrown." Of course every one went along with him and, if anything, the local people's participation was only more reverential. Observing the extreme frailty, someone requested the Maharaja to take care of himself. He replied, "Sree Padmanabha Swamy takes care of me, so why should I worry?" and proceeded to substantiate this remark with an instance in Bombay when he was walking on a pavement and failed to see an open manhole. Suddenly he felt as though he was being lifted and found that the manhole which he noticed then was behind him. God had directly saved him.



1990 was most noteworthy on several counts. With much fanfare, the *Padma Teertham* was completely dredged, cleaned and refilled. The original inlets and outlets, products of brilliant planning, had been blocked in the wake of city expansion schemes. As such this was a marathon task. People from all walks of life joined in to contribute their mite, as a labour of love. As directed by the Maharaja steps were taken to see that no harm befell the fish which lived in the tank. Excitement spread when dredging was nearing completion as a spout of water miraculously shot up like a jet and continued for a few hours. It disappeared as abruptly as it had appeared. In the meantime, people rushed to collect this water which they deemed sacred. Even after four years the water remains clear and uncontaminated. (This is underwritten by the author as a bottle of this water is in her possession).

Sree Chithira Thirunal was a personality who had for long no particular desires other than those related to the Shrine of his heart. One wish of long standing was to see the *Ottakkal Mandapam* covered with gold plating. Due to certain reasons this remained a dream. Valia Thampuram expressed this wish to Col. Gopinathan Nayar as he took over as the Executive Officer. He readily undertook the responsibility of executing the same under his personal supervision. The work commenced in 1165 ME/1990 on the 27th of June. Master goldsmith Ramdas Ashari from Thanjavoor District in Tamil Nadu, along with a team of craftsmen, took up the work which extended to one year and two months. The fourteen pillars on top of the *Mandapam* were covered with beautifully worked gold sheets. A border of gold in delicate filigree was affixed all around the top on the sides of this *Mandapam*. It has received much appreciation from many quarters. In the centre of the border where the small landing of the *Sopanam* is seen, there is an inscription which reads thus:

1166 തുലാം 29

ശ്രീ ചിത്രാ നക്ഷത്ര ജാതേന ശ്രീ പത്മനാഭദാസ

ബാലരാമവർമ്മ മഹാരാജേന ശ്രീ പത്മനാഭ-

മുഖമണ്ഡപേ ഭക്ത്യാ സമർപ്പിതാ ഇതം

സുവർണ്ണലങ്കാരസപര്യം

*"This gold decoration was submitted with utmost devotion to the front platform, the Ottakkal Mandapam, of Sree Padmanabha as a symbol of worship by Sree Padmanabha Dasa Bala Rama Varma Maharaja born under the asterism Chithira (November 1990)."*

As is seen from it, the work was officially finished in 1166 ME/1990 AD as the major portion including plating of all the pillars had been completed by Sree Chithira Thirunal's birthday of *Thulam* (October/November) that year. He had himself seen the completion of the whole project except for a minimum balance of the border. The inscription, though incorporated at Col. Nayar's



own initiative has a special vindication and value of its own. As has been stated in many places, whatever rests on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* becomes the property of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. As Sree Chithira Thirunal had surrendered his all to his Master; it is only in the fitness of things that the name too became the God's direct possession to remain as a record of an exceptional devotee, for all time.

The *Anki* (outer covering) used by Sree Padmanabha Swamy for the *Vetta* and *Arat* processions belonged in reality to Sree Rama Swamy. Sree Chithira Thirunal had desired greatly to have one made exclusively for Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The same reasons which stood in the way of <sup>beaming</sup> gold work being done on the *Mandapam* delayed this step as well. As per the command of the Maharaja, a new *Anki* in gold measuring ~~six~~ <sup>two</sup> feet <sup>eleven inches</sup> in height was fashioned in 1165 ME/1990 AD. It is to the lasting credit of Col. Gopinathan Nayar that these major items of work in gold were accomplished. Their successful execution was a matter of extreme satisfaction to the Maharaja, almost like a decoration of honour for his depthless devotion bestowed on him by Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

As it became difficult to meet certain mandatory expenses of the Temple, Sree Chithira Thirunal directed the Executive Officer to explore new avenues to enhance the income. As a result, public auctions of safe-keeping centres for the use of devotees, toll, contract for oil for the perpetual lamp and so on were introduced recording an encouraging upward trend.

A pension scheme, a long-standing need felt by the employees, was also sanctioned in 1990.

The *Vinayaka Chathurthi* of Sree Maha Ganapathy and the *Mandala Puja* of Sree Sashta were made very elaborate and beautiful.

## Setting Sun

1166 ME/1991 AD dawned. It was destined to be an ominous year in the history of the Temple. Perhaps motivated by some inner urgency, the Maharaja had many things accomplished. The flag-mast of the Thiru Ampati shrine was finished with an outer armour of solid silver. So also the big *Belikkal* of the same shrine was covered with beautifully worked silver. The imposing *Belikkal* on the eastern side of the main sanctum was covered with gold. The inner canopy of the *Sivelippura* was replaced at considerable expense.

The *Painkuni* festival of 1991 was in late March. It is a proven truth that even during the *Alpashi* festival during the monsoon, the rains would stop for the *Vetta* and *Arat* processions though they had been pouring till then. Exceptions to this general rule were indeed very rare. This *Arat* of 31st March 1991 was an exception. The face of the horizon was dark grey with trauma and the clouds



wept incessantly. The procession wended its way through the downpour. Reflecting the mood above, the waves of the ocean raged. This was like an omen and how ominous the omen was, future events were to reveal. The *Arat*, however, concluded as usual.

Sree Chithira Thirunal agreed to the Temple conducting a very elaborate ritual known as *Koti Archana*, which had never taken place here before. The idea was suggested by the Executive Officer and the Maharaja decided to have it done starting with the 1st of *Vrischikom* that year (mid November) which signalled the commencement of the pilgrimage to the famous Sree Sabarimala Temple of Sree Sastha in the forests and to conclude on the 1st of *Makaram* (mid January), of which marked the change of the solstice. It was a very expensive offering and by no means simple. Owing to the disquiet and violence seen all over, this *Koti Archana* was meant for the well being of the people. As it could be conducted only with public participation due to the huge expenses involved, the decision was to make it a one-time affair and not annual. Only the fundamental planning was done with Sree Chithira Thirunal's blessings.

About fifteen days after the *Arat*, following a bad turn of health, Sree Chithira Thirunal was briefly hospitalised, this period coinciding with the *Vishu* or auspicious New Year. As such, he was unable to go to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and submit his *Vishu* offerings.

For a week before the 11th of July 1991, the Maharaja had not been climbing on to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* but would only stand down and worship. The Brahmin attendants concluded that he was not feeling well enough to negotiate the high steps. On the 11th of July he directed them to help him to ascend the *Mandapam*, as he expressed an unusual urgency that day to go on top. He stood in prayer for a very long time; some special change was noticed in him by those in the Temple.

As he got up early on the 12th morning as usual to get ready to leave for the Temple the fates struck. He fell down. The tongue which incessantly repeated the name of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in waking and sleeping hours, was stilled. The stroke was severe and he lay in hospital for eight days.

It is doubtful if any other single private individual had so much of unitary and mass prayers and offerings done for him. In a thus far unknown gesture of devotion the entire Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple staff swung into action. Even as the sands of time were running out, on the morning of 19th July, a *Maha Mruthyunjaya Homam* in the *Homappura* and a *Sayana Pradikshinam* were conducted specifically to propitiate the powers of Death, in a last attempt to save the life of that dearly beloved personality. The Tarananalloor Tantries of the Temple were the officiating priests at the *Homam*, which took place in the presence of all the available priests and officials of the Temple. The colossal



expenses for the same were met by the Temple employees. As the flames flared high reflecting the fires of agony burning in the hearts of the gathering, many of them, along with the members of the Maharaja's family who were present wept openly. It was such a moving scene that it remains engraved in one's memory.

Despite the mounting prayers and flow of love from countless numbers, at ten minutes past 12 midnight on the 4th day in the month of *Karkkatakam*<sup>382</sup> 1166 ME/(20th of July 1991 AD) in the midst of the chanting of heart broken prayers, this great son of the soil, this supreme devotee of Sree Padmanabha Swamy started on his journey back home; to the sacred feet of his Master.

The inert form was brought to the Fort Palace for the public to pay their last respects. Before the public started to pour in, certain religious rites and honours from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, which are the privileges of the 'Valia Thampuram', were accorded to him. As soon as the Temple opened in the early hours of the morning, the Periya Nambi, on whom also rested the duty of giving daily *Prasadam* to the Maharaja, arrived there, silver tray in hand containing all the usual items of the *Vattaka Prasadam* usually received by the Maharaja. He was accompanied by almost the entire section of priests and the Executive Officer and other officials. They came in the specified Temple costume. The Maharaja too was got ready to receive them, also in his usual Temple costume, bare-chested and with a cloth round the waist. One priest carried a heavily gold worked magenta silk *Pattu* on another tray. Sree Uthradom Thirunal, younger brother to the Maharaja and next in line, received the *Prasadas* one by one from the Periya Nambi on behalf of his brother and placed them on Sree Chithira Thirunal's motionless form. His only sister Karthika Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi and all the other members of the family followed suit.<sup>383</sup> The body was covered with the *Thiru Utayatayalam*, the silk which was none other than that which had been draped over the reclining Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in the sanctum, the greatest symbol of honour which the

382. *Sree Chithira Thirunal, his immediate predecessor Maharaja Sree Moolom Thirunal and his uncle who ruled just before him, Maharaja Sree Vishaghom Thirunal all attained eternal rest in the Malayalam month of Karkkatakam under the asterism of Swathi.*

383. *The other members of the direct branch of Sree Chithira Thirunal:*

1. *Karthika Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi (Sister).*
2. *Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma (Brother).*
3. *Pooyam Thirunal Gouri Parvathi Bayi (Niece).*
4. *Aswathi Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi (Niece).*
5. *Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma (Nephew).*
6. *Thiruvathira Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi (Grand-niece).*
7. *Pooruruttathi Thirunal Marthanda Varma (Grand-nephew).*
8. *Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma (Grand-nephew).*
9. *Avittom Thirunal Adithya Varma (Grand-nephew).*



prior rulers also had the fortune to receive. The silk was never removed from the body thereafter.

With all State and military honours the procession moved to the Kaudiar Palace, the Maharaja's residence, where the final rites were to take place. It passed the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in mute farewell. The Temple that had filled his heart and soul, now stood filled with the memories of him, ready to receive his spiritual form within its fondest embrace for all time.

On the next birthday of Sree Chithira Thirunal after he gave up his mortal coils, a full scale *Kulavazha Chirappu* (Refer *Autograph of Ages*, section Sree Swathi Thirunal) which used to take place on the birthdays of all previous Maharajas and had been discontinued for some time, was conducted as in olden times, in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

Few and far between are born such persons who carry with them the hallmark of unquestioned divinity and greatness. From the point of view of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, it is doubtful if any one has done so much under such difficult circumstances, both in prosperity and adversity. He was 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' in the truest and best way possible. Providence engraves the name of this divinity in human form on the expanse of eternity as a tribute to his deathless memory as he shines forever in the golden pages of the history of the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

## Sree Padmanabha Dasa Maharaja Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma

1166 ME/1991 AD

Yet another chapter opened as Sree Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma assumed charge of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in the footsteps of his illustrious brother Sree Chithira Thirunal. By inclination and training his involvement on an emotional plane and otherwise with this Temple had long association. Ardent in his devotion, he too is uncompromising in his priority which is his worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.<sup>384</sup>

In compliance with the sanction already accorded by Sree Chithira Thirunal, Sree Uthradom Thirunal had the *Koti Archana* conducted in a grand manner. The *Natakashala Mukhappu* reverberated with the chanting of the thousand sacred names of Vishnu for two months from morning till evening. The central lamp on which the worship was done was lit by the flame brought from inside the sanctum. This event also helped to bring additional revenue to the Temple.

384. *The present Valia Thampuram does daily Puja to his personal idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy on Ananta. It is a living miracle that this silver idol of amazing brilliance was seen gaining in weight. His Guru Sree Sree Ma Ananda Mayee, explained that devotion is the food of Gods and his depth of devotion had led to this enhancement in weight.*



This was at the end 1992, early 1993, a year later than previously planned as he did not want its conduct in the same year of Sree Chithira Thirunal's demise.

A good many events are recorded in the year 1168 ME/1993 AD. The gold covering of the main *Belikkal* which was started two years before was completed. The Executive Officer arranged for the selective sketching of significant art works inside the Temple, as many of its glories were unknown to the outside world.

As has already been included in the chapter, *Abode of the Divine*, Maharaja Chithira Thirunal's personal idols have a place of worship inside the premises of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. From the Palace they were shifted to the *Thevarappura* (common shrine) which belonged to the family, in the Fort Palace. A *Devaprasnam* was conducted in the presence of the Tantries of Tarananallloor. The astrological calculations revealed that the idols were not satisfied with the existing arrangement. Inviting Sree Padmanabha Swamy as the Arbitrator, another calculation was made and the verdict received was "*Bring them to Me.*" As such on the advice of the Tantries they were installed in the present place beyond the *Sivelippura* and near the *Bhadradeepappura*, which was remodified for this purpose. All expenses are borne by the Palace, including the salary of the priest. Thus, Sree Chithira Thirunal's own personal worship too reached the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple finally. The official installation was in 1167 ME/1992 AD.

This step had the benediction of His Holiness Bharati Teertha Maha Swamigal of Sringeri also. The *Sringeri Madhom* holds the place of preceptor to the Royal House of Travancore.

The mass chanting of *Sahasranama* on the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* was newly introduced on public request. So also the magnificent *Anki* in silver belonging to Sree Hanuman Swamy, which had been out of circulation for very many years, was taken out and placed on the massive Idol as an offering. This too is in considerable demand. Another popular offering introduced this year was the *Ganapathy Homam* done for Sree Agrashala Ganapathy. Though the *Koti Archana* was not repeated in the next year for the same number of days, a simple *Sahasranama Archana* was instituted which received good response.

The year 1169 ME/1994 AD also witnessed a spate of activity. One welcome step has been the re-introduction of playing of the percussion instrument known as *Etakka* in the Temple. The restarting of the *Beli* given to the Bhootam during the two Temple festivals had come to a stop following inability to get a suitable person to perform the rite. As per certain guidelines of the Tantries, with



considerable difficulty a person was located for this purpose from the *Painkuni* festival of that year. Following the recommendation of the Executive Officer, conduct of *Sapthaham* (rendering of *Bhagavatam* within seven days) was allowed, without interference with the routine of the Temple. This is done as an outside offering and not from the Temple funds. The damaged murals are in the process of being redone and this venture was started under the personal supervision of the famed artist Mammiyur Krishnankutty Nair (who has unfortunately expired thereafter) and Prof. M.G. Sasibhooshan. The actual work is now being executed by Sri. Krishnankutty Nair's disciples.

Four silver lamps, which are hand-carried during the *Sreebeli* rites, have been recently finished. One more gold-covered coconut shell for the use of Sree Padmanabha Swamy is in readiness as a standby.

Sree Rama Swamy had no *Ona Villu* (a flat bow made of wood for *Onam* festival) of His own and shared one of the two belonging to Sree Krishna Swamy. From the 1170 ME/1994 AD *Onam* onwards, two new bows made specifically for Sree Rama Swamy were submitted there.

Another important gold work is the plating of the long, narrow window-like part at the feet of the Lord on the northern side of the outer wall of the sanctum. This was submitted literally at the feet of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy just before the start of the *Alpashi Utsavam* of the year.

An uncommon event of the above-mentioned year was the postponement of the *Alpashi Utsavam*. This was necessitated by death pollution in the family of the Tarananalloor Tantries. The functions commenced after that period.

In November 1995 the latest *Murajapam* commenced. Meriting special mention was the participation of many Namboodiries of high standing in the community including the *Thirunava Vadhyam*, *Othikons* etc. on some days during this particular period of prayers. Brahmachari students (many of whom were young boys) from the *Irinjalakkuta Veda Padashala* operating under the patronage of the Kanchi Kamakoti *Sree Sankara Madhom*, also took part in the *Vedam* chanting and *Sahasranamajapam* on two days. The 14th January 1996 stood by in all veneration to witness the fabulous finale of the festival, the *Lakshadeepam*. For the actual *Lakshadeepam*, the Temple appeared like a radiant bride, lavishly bedecked with fire-flare flowers and white electric bulbs. The lights were kept on display on the 15th and 16th as well. However, for the first time in its history the curtain did not ring down on this fanfare of illumination with that day. The conclusion of the festival of lights conducted by the Temple marked the commencement of daily display of lighted oil lamps within certain areas of the sacred premises, accompanied by *Ponnum Siveli*



thereby creating the ambience of a miniature *Lakshadeepam*. This went on without break from the 17th of January upto and including the 30th of that month as offering from individuals and institutions. It was a matter of special happiness that the entire staff of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple joined hands and contributed for one day, while on another day the same was conducted in a grand manner exclusively by the *Mathilakam* (Temple) security guards. The separate fund which was set up for the conduct of this weighty festival which was heavy on expenditure, received gratifying public reaction. With the blessings of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the next *Murajapam* is scheduled from 2001 November and the *Lakshadeepam*, in mid January 2002.

The Ammachi Smt. Radha Devi, consort of Maharaja Uthradom Thirunal submitted a pair of beautifully crafted big gold *Kundalams* (ear ornaments) to the imposing Sree Hanuman Swamy. They adorn the idol on every *Thiru Onam* star.

Sri V. Ganapathy took over as the Executive Officer from Col. K. Gopinathan Nayar in 1996 after the *Lakshadeepam* drew to an end and he held office for a year. Meticulous cleaning of the inside areas of the Temple was undertaken. The interior portions of the *Cheruchuttu* were tiled with granite slabs without disturbing the inside of the Sanctums of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Sree Rama Swamy and Vishwaksenan. This was a humble offering made by this author. The old square granite well near the *Agrashala* was dredged and cleaned to enable collection of pure water. This well invites the attention of many who throw coins into it. A thought flits across the mind that it could be some subconscious gesture of respect to ensure that starvation is kept at bay, as the water from this well had been used for cooking and feeding staggering numbers for over many hundreds of years.

During the tenure of Lt. Col P.S.K. Nair, 1997-'98, the Valia Thampuram sanctioned the conduct of the second *Koti Archana* to take place here. Renovation of the murals on the outer face within the main *Nalambalam* was carried out in the traditional manner. Labour relations assumed a delicate balance, characterised by stress.

Though he occupied the Executive Officers' chair only for over a year from 1998-'99, Col. M.N.S. Thampi's period witnessed certain important events. Due to constant changes in this prime post (which was mainly due to ill health of the concerned officer), the Maharaja's attention on all issues became even more concentrated.

The foundation stone heralding a project to beautify the road leading to the Eastern *Nata* of the Temple was laid by Sri Sivankutty, Worshipful Mayor of



Thiruvananthapuram, on 24th July, 1998. The scheme was to pave that road with granite stones and to cordon it off with chains attached to decorative pillars. The State Government has sanctioned some funds for this purpose. Certain formalities still remain to be cleared before the work takes off.

A ceremony of extreme import, the *Ashtabandha Kalasam* for Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Swamy was conducted with full rituals by the Tantries, the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads, from 12th to 14th of August, 1998. A protective covering in silver was fabricated for the base made for the Sree Krishna Swamy idol during the *Ashtabandam*.

The *Maraka Siveli* of January 1999 deviated from falling on the 1st *Makaram*, to take place on the last day of the preceding month of *Dhanu*. The Zamorin of Calicut, H.H. Ettanunni Raja and his family members witnessed the *Siveli* and worshipped at the Temple the next day. All honours befitting his position were extended to him. Presumably a Zamorin comes to this Temple after an interval of over a century.

On discovering that the tongue of the gold bell suspended from the gold flagmast was missing, possibly due to onslaught of heavy winds, a new one was immediately made and fixed.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) presented a plaque to commemorate Sree Chaitanya Maha Prabhu's pilgrimage to this Temple. The revered Bengali saint is believed to have worshipped here about 600 years back. The plaque has been fixed on the northern wall of the *Natakashala Mukhappu*.

The 28th of July 1999, was a red-letter day for the Temple. For the first time ever, *Sree Veda Vyasa Jayanthi* was celebrated at Sree Vyasa Bhagavan's shrine with special *Pujas* by Tantri Tarananalloor Namboodiripad to the accompaniment of chanting of all the four *Vedas* by erudite Namboodiri and Tamil Brahmins under the leadership of Dr. M. Sambasivan, who is himself an acknowledged scholar. Dr. M. Sambasivan, had presented two tapestries depicting Sree Saraswathi Devi playing on the *Veena*, out of which one was suspended behind the idol. The roof of the front *Mandapam* of the shrine was seen covered with lengths of material in colours of saffron, blue, yellow and red depicting the four *Vedas*. *Deeparadhana* was performed and *Nivedyam* comprising *Unni Appam* and *Sarkara Chondal* offered to the Sage. The Valia Thampuram and the members of the Royal Family were among those present on the occasion. This now goes on the calender of the Temple as an annual event on the full moon day of *Karkkatakam* and is indeed a welcome inclusion with the belief in Sree Vyasa's power to aid academic victories gaining in



strength due to personal experiences of many. Silver and bronze coins of Sree Veda Vyasa have been struck as visualised by the Valia Thampuram and are available for sale at the Temple office.

The latter half of 1999 saw Col. K. Gopinathan Nayar once again in the saddle as the Executive Officer. With Sree Veda Vyasa's re-entry into the limelight, the very first *Vidyarambham* (initiation of little ones into the world of letters) took place within this Temple, totalling to forty one occupied the stage in front of the Sree Veda Vyasa shrine on *Vijaya Deshami* day in *Kanni* (October-November) of that year.

The thirty gold *Kalasa* pots which had holes in them were got repaired with the entire expense being borne by three devotees.

As a real boon to the many who reach these hallowed doors, drinking water facilities were made available due to the sponsorship of the State Bank of Travancore. (This Bank owes its inception to the vision of Sree Chithira Thirunal Maharaja). Renovation of the northern wall murals of the Sree Narasimha Swamy shrine is in progress. In the place of the costs— heavy *Koti Archana*, this time a simple *Sahasranama Archana* was instituted during the same period with tickets initially priced at Rs. 20/- but later scaled down to Rs. 10/-. The first *Archana* each day was in the name of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself under the asterism *Thiru Onam*. General response was most satisfactory.

The holy *Swargavathil Ekadesi* of 1999 (in the month of *Dhanu*) presented a magnificent visual in the form of a *Kulavazha Chirappu* of overwhelming dimensions, the like of which may never before have been conducted in this Temple. The whole Temple stood transformed with banana bunches complete with graceful green leaves and white stems secured to every available pillars throughout the entire expanse of the Temple. Marking yet another first in the books of the Temple, all these *Kulavazhas* numbering around 925 came by the way of public donation under the leadership of Sri Balachandran of Kaladi, Thiruvananthapuram and a group of committed devotees of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Record breaking indeed were the crowds who stood by patiently in long lines for a glimpse of the Deity so dear to their hearts. A brand new gold-plated *Nettippattam* (head decoration) for the Temple elephant Priyadarshini, costing around Rs. 33,000/- was submitted at the *Ottakkal Mandapam* to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by these same devotees on the evening of the *Makara Sivali* of 2000. Carefully planned renovation of the eastern *Raja*



*Gopuram* with focus on maximum preservation and re-enforcement of existing sculptures has started on the 5th of February of this year with the help skilled artisans got down from Madurai. Since cracks have been detected in the massive *Sivelippura* and since its repair will involve heavy financial outlay, a separate fund has been floated specifically for it and other renovation purposes and it is open to receive donations from the public. Response has already started.

For quite some time now *Bhagavatha Sapthahas* which are founded by others are seen to take place within the premises of the Temple. A large-scale nine-day offering of lamps *Niradeepam* and *Ponnum Siveli* covering the *Navaratri* festival have become an annual features as an ongoing expression of deep devotion from Dr. T. Senthilvel, an illustrious son of Sri Lanka. At least on one day he makes it a point to be present for the *Pujas* along with many numbers of his family who come from all over the globe.

The lunar eclipse on the 16th of July 2000 was an extended one starting at 5.25 p.m. and drawing to a conclusion at 9.30 p.m. Due to it the *Karkkataka Siveli* stood postponed to after 11.30 at night and by the time it finally gave over the clock read as 1.15 at night. This change in timing was brought about in obedience to the directives of the Tantries of the Temple, the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads.

There has been a marked increase in the bookings for the conduct of a whole day's *Puja* here, by members of the public, local or otherwise.

So time rotates and with it history dons new colours and fragrance. Despite all changes, the position of the 'Valia Thampuran' in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has been continuous. This has been the most treasured asset of the 'Sree Padmanabha Dasas' and a wealth of increasing spiritual proportions and they believe that they have no identity other than the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. It is the prayer of the family that this same unique fortune of sacred service, this sublime birthright, may continue to descend on the unborn tomorrows also by the grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.



# 8

## MILESTONES OF TIME

### Inscriptions

The role played by inscriptions in the evolution of the historical map of the areas under survey can never be over projected. Their rough and weathered faces attest the authenticity of events and ages, beacon personalities and periods and act as the connecting link between today and significant long bygone yesterdays. The Travancore Inscriptions coming under the present survey are by and large dated ones, which is a rarity in other parts of Kerala, and which consequently enhances their value as records of history.

The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple does not abound in inscriptions may be because its evolution has all along been carefully recorded in its voluminous scrolls. Twenty highly informative inscriptions of varying vintage and at times of seemingly complex language presentation are found engraved in various parts of the Temple. It is said that there could be more relating to this Temple available in different parts of the once vast State of the rulers of the land, which could be unearthed in the homeland or in the libraries of Europe. Despite several attempts a blank has been more or less drawn on this issue due to unavailability of material.

#### 1. Trivandrum Inscription of Kodai Marthanda

This subjoined inscription is found on the south wall of the Goshala-Krishna shrine of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The first portion is in verse form and the whole text is in Sanskrit while the script is in Malayalam. It states that the illustrious Adithya Rama, *"the prosperous and honoured soul of the earth"*, who was the Umbrella-Bearer of Kodai Marthanda Varma made over certain gifts to this shrine. The inscription in translation reads as follows:

*"Hail ! Prosperity ! In the month of Dhanus of (the year) when Jupiter was at its zenith, the illustrious Adithya Rama, the Bearer of the Umbrella of Kodai Marthanda Varma made over certain gifts to this shrine."*



and the bearer of the umbrella of Kodai Marthanda Varman who was the ruler of Kolamba (i.e. Kollam) gave to the lotus eyed (God) residing in the unique Temple of Goshtalaya, a fine drum made of silver, equal in splendour to the Mandara (mountain) and lustrous as a huge mass of sea foam, offerings being provided (at the same time).

In the month of Dhanus (of the year in which) Jupiter stood in Karkkatakam, (on the occasion) when in the assembly of Thiruvananthapuram, the accountant (Sabhanjitha) and (Sam) Padrama-Bhatarar Tiruvadi were present together, Adichcha Raman of Marudaman presented a silver tiruvanakkattudi (drum) for being beaten in (the Temple of) Tiruvayambati Pillai (Krishna). (He also) ordered (provided) for the preparation of a daily sacred offering of two nali of clean rice (as measured) by the Temple measure (Madaai). For these, three salagai and thirty alagachchu were given. The above-said money shall be invested with the Nambies who are the principal priests (of the Temple). Receiving the interest to be obtained every year viz, sixty parai of paddy (as measured) by the correct parai, the expenses shall be defrayed, as long as the moon and the stars (exist). The interest due on the three salagai, fifteen alagachchu and four panam given on loan to Keralaraman of Pulavarambu viz thirty parai of paddy (as measured), by the correct parai from (the yield of) the land (called) Niramannadi, Kuvaipurakkal with the sowing of capacity of eleven parai of seed which had to be brought to the Mandapam, (in front ) of Tiruvayambati (shrine) and measured and given (there) annually on the occasion of Painkuni Uthrom, exclusive of puraikkuli shall be for the wages of the person who has to beat the tiruvanakkattudi. If, (in respect of) this paddy default is made once, over and above this land, all kinds of lands and gardens (properties) belonging to the above named person shall be attached. After realising the capital (achhu) and the interest due thereon, they will be suitably invested again in some place (i.e. with some other persons) and with the interest (so) derived, the allotted work shall be conducted. (In respect of) the sacred offering, if default occurs once, double the quantity at default (shall be obtained); if default is made a second (time), in addition to (collecting) double the quantity at default, a fine also (shall be levied) and if default is made for the third time, double the quantity at default and fine shall be paid to the knowledge of the members of the Assembly and the accountant. Kaman Krishnan, the drummer of this tiruvanakkattudi (in the Temple of) Tiruvayambati and his descendants shall do the assigned duty, receiving food as well as the paddy; measured and given for cooking (the offering) provided for in this. This is the writing of Kandan, Udaiyanan (i.e. Udayanan, son or nephew of Kandan) of Kaidavay, a devotee of the glorious Vishnu." The year is given as 371 ME/1196 AD.<sup>1</sup>

1. I. T.A.S. Vol. III, P. 46.



## 2. Trivandrum Inscription of Veera Rama Kerala Varma

This inscription engraved on the base of the *Mandapam* in front of the central shrine during the rule of Veera Rama Kerala Varma mentions the year as 385 ME/1210 AD. It registers a certain grant of land for feeding Brahmins and for maintaining flower gardens and so on. It speaks of Tongappallavaraiyan, Thiruvananthapuram and Mithranandapuram.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Edanazhi/Vathil Madom Inscription

A fairly lengthy inscription covering one complete granite slab on the side wall of the left *Vathilmadom* close to the *Edanazhi* offers itself for inspection. It is located immediately to the left side as one enters Sree Padmanabha Perumal's *Nalambalam*. Couched in *Vattezhuthu* it employs Tamil language and is partially damaged. Experts conclude that the name in this inscription '*Sree Veera Raman*' who was the *Venattadigal* or Venad ruler of that period and Veera Rama Kerala Varma were the same. Veera Rama Kerala Varma's reign exactly coincides with this time frame. Inscription 2, included above is proof in point. Certain peculiarities in linguistic usage have been noted. The object of the inscription is apparently to register a gift of land by a certain Pallavarayan, probably an officer of the King. Mithranandapuram, which has often appeared in copper plates and records, features here too. His name seems to have had some more letters, now obliterated, preceding it and he is mentioned twice by name (partial though it is). The available text in decoded form is being presented here. "*Hail! Prosperity! In the year when the Jupiter stood in Karkataka (corresponding to) Kollam 384 ..... and on the occasion when the assembly of Thiruvananthapuram and the Samanjita had been pleased to be gathered in the presence of ..... on the south side of Mithranandapuram, ..... figappallavarayan ..... the glorious Veera - Raman ..... the ruler of Venadu (Venattadigal).. Seyyaman, Kalattur, Siraiyaran, Sul, along with the Karai lands and gardens attached to house site (all of which) belonged to ..... Tongappallavaraiyan, so that the cultivators (Pattamal-Umavaral) might measure out by the measure called Perumal-parai for daily current expenses ..... on the day Utrom in (the month of) Painguni of each year ..... with four Nali of rice .... for sacred offerings to the god (Perumal) of Thiruvananthapuram and ... for feeding one Brahmana as well as for condiments ..... Along with daily current (expenses) gruel shall be supplied, and before noon at the time (when a man's shadow measures twelve feet), one great meal ... each shall make one sacred garland and supply. If (in supplying) this paddy, default is made once,..... and if continuously allowed to default, the temple authorities shall by force take the necessary quantity. By the (regular) descendants ..... If*

2. 1. T.A.S. Vol. IV P.66

2. Dr. A.G. Menon - 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758'  
CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhanta eGangotri Gyaan Kosha



..... shall be taken to the Sripadamulam, and there decided and given. Thus ..... of Kaidaivalayam. Kollam year - 385.”<sup>3</sup>

A difference in the year is noticed in the text as reproduced in the T.A.S. Volume IV with 384 appearing in the text of the inscription and 385 at its conclusion.

#### 4. The Belikkal Inscription

This is on the *Belikkal* of the Sree Krishna shrine in this Temple. It is damaged. The King, Veera Iravi Iravi Varma (who must have been the Chiravayi Mooppan) and Sarvanganathan, Thrippappoor Senior Thiruvadi are mentioned. The language is Tamil Vattezhethu.<sup>4</sup>

#### 5. Namaskara Mandapam Inscription of Sree Krishna shrine—I

Engraved on the front *Mandapam* of the Sree Krishna shrine are words to the effect that Adithya Varma alias ‘Sarvanganathan’ built this Temple, the platform facing it and the *Goshala*. It is written in Sanskrit in *Grantha*. The date is given as 549 ME/1374 AD.<sup>5</sup>

#### 6. Namaskara Mandapam Inscription of Sree Krishna shrine – II

This is written on the self same *Namaskara Mandapam* of the Sree Krishna shrine and is about the same donor and repeats his donations. The main difference is in the year revealed by the chronogram Chola priya = 1296 Saka = 550 ME or 1375 AD. It is in Sanskrit *Grantha*.<sup>6</sup>

#### 7. (Thiruvananthapuram) Inscription of Veera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal

This inscription is seen in the *Thulabharakkal* in the main shrine area, in two sections, carrying, the year as 776 ME/1601 AD. The text is basically in Tamil though Sanskrit usage is also seen. It is as follows:- “Be it well! Prosperity! In the Year four thousand, seven hundred and two (current), when Saturn was in the Tula (rasi), Jupiter in the Kanya (rasi) in the Kollam year 776, on a Saturday which was the 12th of the month Mithunam and (nakshatram) Punarvasu, when there occurred an eclipse of the sun, the (King) Veera Ravi Ravi Varman alias Kulasekhara Perumal of the Keezhaperoor Illom (house)

3. T.A.S. Vol. IV, Part I.

4. 1. Vasudeva Poduval – Topographical List of Travancore Inscriptions.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – ‘History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.

5. 1. T.A.S. Vol. I, page 172.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – ‘History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.

6. 1. Dr. A.G. Menon – ‘History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.

2. Ibid – 171.



and belonging to the Thrippappoor Swaroopam (family) weighed himself against gold. (in commemoration of this event) the Mandapam in which the Thulapurusha Maha Danam was given away (to Brahmins) was built by the wives (Kettinattavar)" Iraiymakkuttiyammai and (Ilaya) Iraiymakkuttiyammai. They built this Mandapam.<sup>7</sup>

Historical records also underline the greatly pious disposition of this King and his family who were lavish in expending finances on temples scattered far and near for their renovation, repair and additions. Veera Ravi Ravi Varma who assumed the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal' after the *Thulapurusha Danam* and *Hiranyagarbha* (as well as the remaining fourteen great *Danas*) has been lauded as a true and great devotee of the "God Padmanabhaswamin" and he seems to have made Thiruvananthapuram his residential quarters.

## 8. Eastern Gopuram Inscription

This is an exceedingly significant inscription despite the fact that it is largely incomplete as many letters have been erased probably due to the exposure to the elements, especially rain. Some constructional activity would have necessarily taken place after the foundation stone was laid for this *Gopuram* in 741 ME/1565 AD during the kingship of Adithya Varma but well before Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, who was mainly responsible for the same and who came nearly two hundred years hence. This inscription corrects the popular belief that totally credits Marthanda Varma with the erection of this edifice. Though undoubtedly his part was maximum, this *Gopuram* had by 782 ME/1607 AD risen to at least around fifteen feet from the ground to the level of this long inscription in two parts which stands inscribed on the inner wall facing the courtyard. Both the language and the script are in old Tamil. While the name of the King in question cannot be arrived at from the information now available, it is definite that he was Ravi Varma. This deduction is based on the time frame of 782 ME/1607 AD when a King by this name reigned, identified as from Thrippappoor Swaroopam. There is strong similarity of language and style between this inscription and the Keralapuram Siva Temple<sup>8</sup> inscription belonging to this King. The *Kumbhabhishekam* he got conducted here and, more enlightening, his veneration to God Padmanabha are engraved there. All these act as confirmation that both this inscription and the Keralapuram inscription belong to the same ruler. In the fifth line of this difficultly damaged inscription the letters 'கும்' (kum) and 'பா' (Pa) are legible while the three

7. I. T.A.S. Vol. II, page 29.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'.

8. T.A.S. Volume I, Page 261, Refer end of the chapter for this inscription.



succeeding letters cannot be made out, raising the doubt whether the five letters together would have read as *Kumbhabhishekam*. From the available sentences it is concluded that it refers to items submitted to the Temple for *Nityadana Chilavu* or for daily expenses like *Teertha Kutam* (pot for holy water) and *Vattaka* of copper (special type of vessel). Nothing else is clear.<sup>9</sup>

## 9. Thiruvampati Perumal Shrine Dhwaja Sthambham Inscription

This is another historically important inscription concerning the Sree Krishna Swamy Temple within the walls of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. By the date, it is set in the turbulent times of Umayamma Rani and her son Iravi Varma though their names do not find a place in it. The language resorted to is Sanskrit while the script appears in Malayalam *Vattezhuthu* with the year reading as 866 ME/1691 AD. Information gathered is as follows:- "*In this year, in the month of Mithunam (June/July) when the asterism became Thiru Onam and the Rasi, Chingom by the grace of Bhagavan Hari for the memory of Sree Govinda (Krishna) the Dhawaja Sthambham was erected by mother.*"<sup>10</sup> The term 'mother' points to the Queen Umayamma and the personage who had the inscription worded, her son Iravi Varma.

## 10. Inscription of Bala Marthanda Varma – I

On the southern side of the *Abhisravana Mandapam* is the inscription of this great King dated 904 ME/1729 AD which announces the commencement of reconstruction of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple complex.<sup>11</sup>

## 11. Inscription of Bala Marthanda Varma – II

On another side of the previously mentioned *Mandapam* (*Abhisravana*) is another inscription by the same donor which states that in 906 ME/1731 AD on the said date the single stone for the *Ottakkal Mandapam* reached the site.<sup>12</sup>

## 12. Inscription of Bala Marthanda Varma – III

This is another exceedingly significant inscription seen on the south side of the front *Mandapam* close to the *Ottakkal Mandapam*. It displays the record of Bala Marthanda Varma on the construction of the Image of Sree Padmanabha Swamy with the help of Balaranya Konideva and his disciples on the 3rd day of *Painkuni* (March/April) of the Malayalam year 908 ME/1733 AD.<sup>13</sup>

9. C. Lalitha Bai, Epigraphy Assistant, Dept. of Archaeology, Kerala.

10. C. Lalitha Bai, Epigraphy Assistant, Dept. of Archaeology, Kerala.

11. T.A.S. Vol. I, P. 40.

12. T.A.S. Vol. I, P. 40.

13. T.A.S. Vol. I, P. 41.



### 13. Namaskara Mandapam Inscription

On a pillar of this *Mandapam* Marthanda Varma's name is inscribed along with details of donation by a private individual. The language is Tamil and the year 908 ME corresponding to 1733 AD.<sup>14</sup>

### 14. Thiru Ampati Inscription – South-I

An undated inscription in Tamil *Vattezhuthu* on the south wall of the Sree Krishna shrine registers the gift of two lamps made to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.<sup>15</sup>

### 15. Thiruvayambati Inscription – South-II

Another inscription in Tamil appears on this side regarding the gift of land for the expenses of burning a single lamp. *"Hail! Prosperity! In the month of Vrischika of the year when Jupiter was in Karkkataka, Kaman Kunrappolan of Perundottam in Kuttamangalam provided one sacred lamp to (the Temple of) Thiruvayambati Perumal at Thiruvananthapuram and assigned for it with libation (of water) the lands Kunjurvayal in Peruvenkadu, together with the coconut garden and the Karai attached to it; as well as the Perumadai vayal together with the coconut garden and Karai attached to it. For all these lands his nephews should have the Karanmai right (i.e. the right of cultivation) and that they should, with the owner's share obtained from them, maintain the lamp Kaman Kunrappolan gave with libation (of water) these lands stipulating that if default was made, double the quantity should be paid and that even afterwards these persons (i.e. the nephews) should retain the Karanmai right."*<sup>16</sup>

The repeated mention of the nephews is noteworthy as it could be an indication of the existence and acceptance of the matrilineal system even among some societies of Tamil stock.

### 16. Thiruvayambati Inscription – East-I

On the eastern wall above this shrine, a gift of land is inscribed. The proceeds of the same were to be utilised to procure oil for bathing the Deity of Thiru Ampati.<sup>17</sup>

### 17. Thiru Ampati Inscription – East-II

This inscription of antiquity is also engraved on the eastern wall of this shrine but is completely damaged.<sup>18</sup>

14. I. R. Vasudeva Poduval – *Topographical List of Travancore Inscriptions*.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – *'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'*.

15. T.A.S. Vol. III, P. 43-46.

16. T.A.S. Vol. III, P. 44-46.

17. T.A.S. Vol. III, P. 132.

18. Dr. A.G. Menon – *'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'*.



## 18. Thiru Ampati Inscription – North

A lengthy engraving having no specified date, on the northern wall of this shrine records the gift of a drum and money.

It is not sure if it has connection with Kodai Marthanda's inscription about Adithya Rama.<sup>19</sup>

Proportionately the inscriptions are concentrated in and around the Thiru Ampati shrine.

Two more inscriptions are to be seen and they both belong to the current age and relate to Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma on whom rested the great privilege of having submitted the longest tenure of service to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

## 19. Inscription of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma

On emerging from the *Nalambalam* through the doorway positioned to the north, immediately on the right hand side on the wall is a plaque carrying the inscription dealing with the renovation being started in the Temple.

“നാകികാമ്യേത്ര കോളമ്ബേ  
വൃശ്ചികേ പുഷ്യവാസരേ  
ജീർണ്ണോദ്ധാരണമാരബ്ധം  
ശ്രീ ചിത്രക്ഷിതിപാജ്ഞയാ”

“As ordered by Sree Chithira Thirunal Maharaja, the renovation was started on the Pooyam day in the year 1110 ME in the month of “Vrischikom” (which corresponds to November/December). The language is Sanskrit and the script, Malayalam. The chronogram *Nakikamyē* reveals the year as 1110 ME/1934 AD.

The renovation had to be carried out following the outbreak of fire in the previous month.

## 20. The Ottakkal Mandapam Inscription in Gold

This is the only inscription engraved on gold base and is seen at the front central point of the gold border which goes round the three sides of this single stone *Mandapam*. The small landing of the *Sopanam* is just before it. It relates to the submission of the gold ornamentation of the *Mandapam* in question. The language is Sanskrit and the script, Malayalam.

1166 തുലാം 29  
ശ്രീ ചിത്രാ നക്ഷത്ര ജാതേന  
ശ്രീ പത്മനാഭ ദാസ ബാല രാമ വർമ്മ മഹാരാജേന  
ശ്രീ പത്മനാഭ മുഖണ്ഡപേ ഭക്ത്യാ സമർപ്പിതാ  
ഇയം സുവർണ്ണാലങ്കാരസപര്യയാ

19. T.A.S. Vol. III, P. 46.



*"This gold decoration was submitted with utmost devotion to the front platform (Mandapam) of Sree Padmanabha as a symbol of worship by Sree Padmanabha Dasa Bala Rama Varma Maharaja born under the asterism Chithira. (Date of inscription reads as Thulam 1166 ME/ November 1990 AD).*

Till now the inscriptions under survey have all been the ones within the four walls of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Many are the inscriptions relating to the ruling dynasties found scattered all over south India. Efforts are still on to trace those which specifically relate to this great Temple. A few such famous inscriptions are being included herewith.

## 21. The Kanyakumari Stone Inscription

A contemporary vassal of King Kulotunga Chola who ruled between 245 and 295 ME or 1070 and 1120 AD and who was named Parandaka Pandyan, gifted ten ornamental gold lamps to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple at *Anantapura*.<sup>20</sup> This inscription appears on the wall of the *Sreekovil* of the Sree Kanyakumari Devi Temple in Kanyakumari.

“അനന്തപുരത്തെമ്മാർക്കു നിലവിയ പൊൻമണിവിളക്കു  
നിന്റെരിയ പത്തമെത്തു”

As is seen from above, the language is old Tamil.

## 22. Thiruvattar Inscriptions

Two inscriptions from the many available at the Sree Adi Kesava Perumal Temple, Thiruvattar, have been included here in extract form only. Both belong to the King stated in inscriptions 8 and 23, Veera Ravi Ravi Varman of Thrippappoor in Thiruvananthapuram. He is cited as a *'Votary of Padmanabha (God of Thiruvananthapuram)'* and as *'adorer of the feet of God Padmanabha'*. The language and letters are Tamil and the period KO 779/1603 AD and KO 778/1603 AD.<sup>21</sup>

## 23. Keralapuram Inscription of Veera Ravi Ravi Varman

In the inscription numbered eight of this chapter, the inscription under survey has already been introduced. Yet it invites expansion at least in compromise which is over and above historic interest. While admitting the ultimate oneness of Godhead despite the multiplicity of names and forms Hinduism offers, the Thrippappoor Dynasty's unwavering devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy has been its unbroken inheritance from generation to generation. Repeatedly acknowledged and accepted, it often surfaces in places far removed from the actual location of the Temple (of Sree Padmanabha Swamy), may be as a re-affirmation of faith. The Keralapuram inscription is an example in point.

20. T.A.S. Vol. I, P. 23.

21. T.A.S. Vol. I, P 258, 260.



*"Harih! Be it well! Hail! Prosperity! Vira Ravivarman alias Kulasekharadeva – who was born of Umaiymmai born in the Rohini Nakshatram (star) and residing at Thiruvananthapuram who was himself born in the Tirukkettai Nakshatram, who was incessantly worshipping the feet of the God Padmanabha, who had made the sixteen great gifts beginning with Tulapurusha, who was learned in all the sciences and arts, who was protecting all his subjects and who was a sun to the hosts of his foes – built of stone the Nalu Ambalam, the kitchen and the Rishabha Mandapam in the Temple of the God Mahadeva of Virakeralaesvaram in Muttalakkurichchi in the Sengalunirvalanadu."*

It also goes on to state that the *Kumbhabhishekam* ceremony was performed after further structural work and details the dates, time, asterism and so on.<sup>22</sup> The year reads as KO 782/1607 AD and the language and alphabet Tamil.

So they stand, these inscriptions, enriching the history they represent, as staunch sentinels of time.

---

22. T.A.S. Vol. I, P. 261, 262.



## 9

## LEGENDS AND FOLKLORE

Every temple is encircled by legends and folklore which are by and large delightful narrations lending a brand of colour and charm all their own. They contribute to infusing the human touch in many instances into the spheres of the Divine. Apart from that, their worth cannot be undermined because they provide valuable insight into the times and events of which we were not part. They also act as sources of continuity between the past and the present doubling as the not fully substantiated evolution of the temples they deal with. They are born of truth and, to this author's way of thinking, can never be dismissed as mere extensions of imagination. There is a possibility that during the course of time and amidst the narrations, some inaccuracies may creep in but their fundamental nature cannot but be authentic due to the historical backup, even if partial.

A collection of such presentations which have percolated down the years through oral tradition are included here. Many of them are supported by written matter even if they may not be official records; but the very term 'tradition', even though oral, lends a sort of credibility to them.

### Pulaya connections

One of the oldest stories circles round the re-consecration of this Temple after Vilvamangalam (Refer chapter *Sihala Puranam*). It is said that a Pulaya woman found an abandoned baby in the forest, a baby bathed in glory. Unable to leave him, she took the infant back to her hut and started to bring him up as her own, showering on him all love and care that welled up within her. It is said that when he had reached about one and a half years of age, one day as she was carrying him in her arms, a sound was heard from somewhere. The little one suddenly rose upwards and transforming into a flash of pure radiance, disappeared into the Temple that was being constructed. Instead of the baby, she found that she had in her hands a small figure made of wood (believed to be *Iluppa* wood). This poor, uneducated woman, even in her great distress was



however, able to grasp the fact that it was some Divinity which had shared her heart and hut, gratitude and overwhelming adoration filled her very being. In her humble way she poured her emotions in worship to the memory of the Divine Child. The day of the actual consecration of the Temple drew near and on the night prior to the great event, the chief priest had a dream in which he was directed by God Himself to light the very first lamp in the sanctum with the flame brought from the hut of this Pulaya woman, on whom destiny had bestowed the immeasurable good fortune of having been mother to the paramount Power in human form for a modest span of time. The chief priest obeyed the mandate to the letter. Thus it is said that the first lamp of the sanctum came to life from the flame coming from that poor Pulaya cottage.

Apart from the fact that it is indeed a touching story, it has its own social significance as it belongs to the period when untouchability was deep-rooted.

### **Sree Hanuman Swamy in the Thiru Ampati Namaskara Mandapam**

There is a finely carved figure of Sree Hanuman Swamy in wood on the ceiling of the front platform outside the Thiru Ampati. Many devotees pay their homage to this figure after worshipping Sree Krishna Swamy, who is visualised as Parthasarathy, the Charioteer of Partha (or Arjuna who is the third of the five Pandava brothers) during the Mahabharatha War.

It is said that amidst his wanderings Arjuna reached Rameswaram for the purpose of venerating Sree Rama Swamy. On seeing the remnants of the great bridge built across the sea to Lanka with the help of the monkey hordes, he wondered aloud why the Lord did not construct His own route with His divine arrows. A small monkey standing nearby told Arjuna that such a construction would have been unable to bear the physical weight of his ancestors. Arjuna replied that he too could put up a bridge with the potency of his arrows which would have had sufficient strength. The young monkey challenged him to do so saying that it would not bear even his small weight. Arjuna agreed and added in his usual impulsive fashion that if he failed he would end his life by jumping into the fire but, if he won, the young monkey would have to become his servant. An agreement reached, the bridge was erected with supercharged arrows. The monkey stepped on it and lo! it collapsed. Three times over Arjuna attempted and met with defeat. True to his own declaration, he built up a fire and got ready to sacrifice his life in those flames. Just before he could do so, a young Brahmin boy bathing in the sea nearby came rushing up and prevented the act by declaring the challenge invalid as it had been taken in the absence of a middle person. The whole process restarted, this time the winds of fortune shifting in total favour of Arjuna, as the monkey was unsuccessful in breaking the arrow bridge. The realisation dawned on both of them simultaneously, making the monkey lad (who was none other than the mighty Sree Hanuman)



cry out "*Sree Ramachandra*" and Arjuna cry out "*Sree Krishna*" as they prostrated before the Brahmin boy who was the Lord Himself. They realised that they were made to enact this entire drama so that the ego that was building up within them would be effectively quelled.

Hanuman agreed to be present as the emblem on the flag of the Pandava side if a war was ever to erupt between the two groups of cousins.<sup>1</sup>

It is believed that it is Sree Hanuman who is present here, true to his word as Sree Krishna readies to take up His own role as the Divine Charioteer to Partha. His presence serves to remind us that from whatever source it may have stemmed, ego is destructive to progress and is to be eliminated at all cost.

## The Episode of the Ring

The legend of the ring has been a favourite down the years and has two versions. A priest in his desire to check if the Ocean of Milk really as present behind the reclining figure of the Lord, tied a ring to the end of a string and threw it behind the Idol. When he pulled it back it was wet with milk. In the second version, the ring disappeared and surfaced two days later on the Shankumughom Beach (about 4 k.m. away), where it was washed up by the waves. The explanation is that it was taken there through an underground tunnel leading to the sea which could have been an escape route.

## The Sapta Rishies

There is an interesting story about the *Siveli* marking change of the solstice twice a year (start of Malayalam months of *Makaram* and *Karkkatakam* corresponding to mid January and mid July), which takes place in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The procession halts briefly at the northern entrance. Vasishta and Arundhati reside in Risyamangalam (Rishimangalam) engaged in *Puja*. It is said that the other sages also gather there on these two days of the year and that all the Seven Sages or *Sapta Rishies* proceed to the Northern Entrance to wait there for worship of the Lord. They do not enter the Temple as the Swamy who is at rest or in '*Sayanam*' would get up on perceiving them. So the procession halts at the entrance for a while for them and then moves on. Worship over, the Seven Sages and Arundhati return to their respective places.

It must be remembered that the *Sapta Rishi Teertham* in Risyamangalam is listed as one of the *Teerthas* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

## The King's Vision

In the bygone days of prosperity, the *Maha Ganapathy Homam* used to be performed on a lavish scale using one thousand and eight coconuts daily during

1. This is based on an article by Sri T.S. Ananthasubramoniam (Name of publication not known).



the period of the *Homam*. The then King felt that it was too extravagant and wanted to cut down the number. As such he consulted the Tantri on the matter. The next day, as the oblation was in progress the Tantri (Namboodiripad) asked the King to touch him. (This seems to be unlikely unless he was not the person who was doing the *Homam*). The King obeyed and thereupon he saw in the fires the vision of Lord Ganapathy with the coconuts fast disappearing into His wide open mouth. The idea to reduce the number was immediately abandoned.

## Sree Narasimha Swamy

Another narration which is fully substantiated is connected (possibly) with the re-consecration of the powerful Sree Narasimha Swamy. At the exact auspicious time of the consecration there was a sudden outbreak of fire caused by the ferocity of this Divinity. Holes or *Sutras* based on the principles of *Vastu* construction were introduced in the opposite wall as part of a compensatory process to reduce the high charges, under the directions of the Tantries, as it was not possible to approach the idol even for the acts of worship. Normally *Sutras* in such a position are uncommon. The presence of an invisible and fierce lion has been felt by many, over and over again, especially after the Temple falls silent after worship. The roar of a lion has also been heard a few times (Refer chapter *Miracles*).

## The Kovalam Poets

Aswatthama found standing near Sree Veda Vyasa in a subshrine of this Temple also features in a story treasured and lovingly passed on from generation to generation in the family of the two brothers well known as the *Kovalam Kavies* or 'Poets of Kovalam', Ayyippilla Ashan and Ayyanpilla Ashan. They were two ordinary people with no claim to scholarship acting as watchmen to some land reportedly owned by the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Smt. Gomathy Amma, their direct descendant and reader of these books as a religious custom, also supports the above statement and the following story. Both brothers would regularly repair to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple for worship. One day the elder brother Ayyippilla set off for early morning worship at the Temple without waking his sleeping brother. On his way back after *Darsanam*, he saw a person possessing divine radiance walking a little ahead of him. On reaching the Thiruvallom river this stranger gave him a banana from the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and just walked over the water and reached the opposite bank to the amazement of the watching Ayyippilla and disappeared. Ayyippilla ate the banana and, throwing away the skin, returned to his post of duty. He woke up his sleeping brother and started singing a song, which went far beyond the comprehension of the younger brother in language, style and ideas. The younger brother asked him what had occurred and on hearing about the divine stranger and the banana, enquired of him what he had



done with the skin. Ascertaining where it had been discarded, he rushed to the spot, found the skin and ate it and returned to his elder brother. By that time he too had become a poet. Ayyippilla Ashan, as the elder brother then came to be known, authored the great work *Ramakatha Pattu*, which was what he was singing that morning after consuming the banana and his brother Ayyanpilla Ashan, the *Mahabharatha Pattu*. Both are widely acclaimed in the literary circles and the former work used to be sung during the festival of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, being one among the ninety nine *Arangams* or performances staged there. The brothers lived about six hundred years ago. The divine stranger is believed to have been none other than Aswatthama residing in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, whose specific blessing changed the brothers into great scholars in a matter of minutes (perhaps it was one of the acts of penance Aswatthama did to mitigate the burden of his past *Karma*).

## The Ghee Lamp

It is said that long ago a certain Maharaja had ordered that a ghee lamp should be lit. For some reason ghee could not be procured. The king was informed and the lamp was burnt with oil.

When the king came for worship he found to his surprise that it was ghee that was feeding the lamp and he exclaimed, "*Is there a well yielding ghee here?*" On inspection such a well was discovered. Later a *Mandapam* was built over it to mark this spot. This is the *Thiruvolakka Mandapam*, the name being derived from the *Thiru Vilakku* or sacred lamp.

## A Prediction

One cannot state with certainty the time when the *Chempakathumootu Nata* episode took Place. There lived an astrologer of great name and fame in the city and with the intention of testing out his expertise the king asked him to be brought to the palace. He enquired of the astrologer which entrance he, the king, would be using to enter the Temple the next day for his routine worship. The Brahmin smiled and replied that the next day he would receive written proof in his hands as to which entrance he would use. The disbelieving king granted him leave to go. Resolving to show up the astrologer's claims as false the ruler ordered that a part of the wall on the eastern side be broken open to enable him to enter the Temple avoiding all the existing entrances. Accordingly an opening was made in the wall when a *Chempu* or a copper plate fell into the hands of the workmen. This was immediately submitted to the king. To his utter amazement he saw inscribed on the copper sheet the words to the effect that, that day (date also inscribed), the king would enter the Temple through this particular opening. Realising his own lack of understanding of a great man, the king immediately summoned the astrologer and bestowed on him



many gifts in appreciation. Apart from that he had the opening transformed into a permanent entrance, thenceforth to be exclusively used by the King and his immediate family. It was intentionally constructed in much smaller proportions, the height being so modest that it would be necessary for a tall person to lower his head to pass through, so as to emphasise the aspect of humility essential to travel on the path to Godhead. This is the oft-mentioned *Chempakathumootu Nata*, deriving its name from this incident, and is still in daily use exclusively by the Royal Family.

## Narrations connecting Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma

The Temple abounds in stories connecting Marthanda Varma with it. This is not surprising as almost the entire super-structure of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple with the exception of the Thiru Ampati portion, and top two floors of the eastern pagoda (*Gopuram*)<sup>oo</sup> were constructed during his time under personal supervision, which was there all throughout despite the seething internal and external unrest and disloyalty at close quarters and wars of expansion and conquest. These narrations highlight the unwavering dedication and commitment to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, illustrate the singular grace of the Lord on His chosen devotee as well as the humility of this otherwise towering personality. There are endearing human touches also. The many episodes which are so familiar to the author and so many in this place, are narrated here.

Even as the Thrippappoor Mooppan and Yuvaraja during the time of his uncle Maharaja Rama Varma, Marthanda Varma's greatest dream was to renovate the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, which displayed the scars of the fury of fire in the late Sixteen Hundreds in the time of Veera Iravi Varma.

Story has it that while the King sat on the sands of Shankumughom (which has such close links with this Temple) in deep contemplation, in a bid to get temporary relief from the traumas and tensions plaguing him, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself appeared before him in a vision and directed the King to seriously undertake the renovation. "*Dear son of Mine, noblest of the Vanchi Dynasty, renovate My abode at Syanandoora that has been in ruin for long. Go into battle bravely and defeat the kings of the land and from the wealth derived meet the expenses for this formidable work. Like Arjuna you will nowhere be defeated.*"<sup>2</sup>

Another version which has more credibility to it is also available. During the tension – fraught days of his reign, Marthanda Varma was once resting in the *Oottu Pura* of the Sree Sankaranarayana Temple at Kulasekharam, a village near Thiruvananthapuram, when in semi-sleep he saw a man bathed in lustre, standing before him. He informed the King of the presence of a treasure beneath



a *Pala* tree (*Alstonia Scholaris*) standing near at hand and directed him to retrieve it and utilise it for his needs. The King awoke with a start and, following the instructions, unearthed a pile of gold coins from the spot. He named the area *Palappalli* as it still continues to lie known, and, as a token of his immense gratitude, ordered that on his behalf a *Palppayasam Nivedyam* should be offered to Sree Sankaranarayana as part of the routine worship. This was adhered to till 1965, when it was discontinued by the Travancore Devaswom Board.

The authenticity of the above cannot be proved but it is indisputable that Divine inspiration and protection alone guided and guarded Marthanda Varma enabling him to accomplish so much, overcoming adversity of all kinds in a manner which could be justifiably labelled only as superhuman.

The *Ottakkal Mandapam*, the platform formed of a single massive granite, is famous for more reasons than one. It has also stood many times witness to history in the making. Hewed out of a rock in Thirumala, an area in Thiruvananthapuram which got this name because of this, the stone of formidable dimensions made its laborious and historic journey to the Temple. Many elephants, horses and men contributed to its onward movement so that it could arrive intact and as one single unbroken rock. A popular story revolves around this incident.

It is said that the stone had reached the foot of an elevated portion of the ground and the task force, exhausted by the toils of labour as well as by the heat of the mid day sun, had broken off from work to take food and well-earned rest. The Maharaja however stayed by its side, his mind perplexed with how to take it up and down the rather steep terrain without causing damage. Oblivious to the discomfort he pondered over different ways to gain the end. A young man of obvious class and refinement wearing a single short cloth round his waist, bare-bodied and having the holy thread, the symbol of the high caste, came up to try a hand at taking the stone over the difficult ground. Instead of getting annoyed at the seeming absurdity of the request, the King, perhaps amused, granted the stranger his wish. The young man just touched the huge rock with one finger and to the utter amazement of Marthanda Varma, it started to roll up the hillock and then down, followed by this individual! Jumping to his feet the King ran after him but the stranger and the rock moved so fast that in a trice it had safely reached the other side and the man had just vanished into thin air. Realisation dawned on Marthanda Varma as to the true nature of the helpful stranger. Since no human being could perform such a feat, it was Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself who had come to extend help to the King who stood overcome with emotion at this incredible blessing.

Another facet of this illustrious personality is brought to light by the following episode. The King always treated the master craftsmen engaged in working in the Temple with honour. Their high-quality work never failed to



please him and at every possible opportunity he too would be within the premises viewing their progress. The sculptures in the *Belikkal* area, big in size and rich in detail, demanded concentration and undivided attention. The master sculptor had been working tirelessly on a figure for quite a duration, lying flat on his back. He called out to his assistant to pass up a betel leaf for him to chew after adding the required ingredients. The rolled-up betel leaf was carefully placed in his outstretched hand. On putting it in the mouth, the master found it not to his liking at all and in great irritation he shouted at his assistant. Then as he looked down to take the subordinate to task, he found to his utter dismay that it was the King who had prepared and given the betel leaf, inexperienced though he was in such things, in the absence of the assistant who was not nearby at that particular moment. Falling at Marthanda Varma's feet the man tendered an abject apology. The King comforted him and praised his unwavering attention to his work. He conferred on the sculptor the title of *Anantha Padmanabhan Moothashari* and finally rewarded him with a pair of *Attathodu Veerashrinkhala*, bangles for both hands which were State decorations of the highest honour. This is supported by records.

For a long time now only the *Alpashi* festival was being conducted in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This came during the second rainy season of the year. Once as the Deities were commencing their festival circumambulation inside the walls of the Temple, the rains came down with a heavy hand. There was no option but to conduct the procession though all were thoroughly drenched. Looking up at the frowning skies, Marthanda Varma proclaimed, "*If it be with Your Divine consent Sree Padmanabha, within six months I shall have a covering constructed so that the Siveli procession can be conducted without exposing the Deities to the rains.*" The magnificent *Sivelippura* which exists even today is the result. Now also it is acknowledged as a wonder not only for its physical proportions and architectural work but for the limited time of six months taken to start and complete the whole work in an age when all the labour was manual except for the use of elephants. Full details of the same and about the chief sculptor have been dealt with at length in the chapter *Abode of the Divine*.

With the completion of these covered corridors, the *Painkuni* festival which lay suspended for over centuries was revived. It came six months after the *Alpashi* festival. The King also got erected five massive figures of the Pandava brothers on the road facing the eastern entrance. Since the third brother Arjuna was the son of Indra who controlled rains, this was done to propitiate Indra and keep away the downpour. As such this festival also obtained an additional name, the *Pancha Pandava Utsavam* (the festival of the five Pandavas). While the expenses for the *Alpashi Utsavam* were defrayed by the Temple, the *Painkuni Utsavam*, which was far more elaborate in decorations and outer attractions, was conducted by the King from his own resources.



One more incident is available and fairly well known illustrating the ability of this exceptional personage. The main construction work was over and the Maharaja desired that by the next day the vast Temple grounds should be cleared of the considerable debris and made spic and span. The officers conveyed the difficulty of getting this done within such a limited period. The Maharaja remained silent but as he came out after his daily worship, he stopped at one of the open courtyards and, after removing his upper waistcloth, spread it on the ground, put as many stone bits as it could hold and still without uttering a word, bundled it up, placed the bundle on his head and walked out to throw the contents away. This activated the accompanying officers and men into immediate action and they themselves followed his example in clearing the grounds. As a result, within a short period of time, the whole place was beautifully cleaned. It could be Marthanda Varma's belief in the dignity of labour especially in the service of Sree Padmanabha Swamy or it could be a shrewd move of an able administrator to gain the desired result; whatever it be, he succeeded in accomplishing his aim with considerable ease.

Though unsubstantiated with written proof, it is said that an *Asareeri* was heard after Marthanda Varma performed the *Thrippati Danam* of lasting fame, the Deed of Total Dedication to Sree Padmanabha Swamy (see Modern History – chapter *Autograph of Ages* for details). The voice conveyed pleased acceptance by the Lord of this unique and complete act of devoted surrender of Maharaja Marthanda Varma.

### Tarananalloor Namboodiripad and the Sreebhootabeli

While the exact date is not available, there are enough records to provide proof of the chain of events leading to the stopping of *Beli* for the Bhootam<sup>3</sup> by the Tantries during the festivals in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This is a complicated process requiring much knowledge and experience. Records have it that due to ill-will between the Tantries and a Potti of the *Ettara Yogam*, the Potti decided to land the Tantries in such trouble that they could even forfeit their right to *Tantram* in the Temple. In those days the dates for the commencement of the festivals were more elastic. As such, communication was intentionally sent to the Tarananalloor *Illom* of the Tantries giving a date of very short notice at a time when all the senior male members were away. Only one young Namboodiri boy was there who had just been invested with the holy thread. As there was no alternative available, the boy's mother blessed him and sent him to Thiruvananthapuram with the famous *Grantham* or manual of procedure entrusted to that family by Sree Parasurama centuries back. The festival started and the *Sreebhootabeli* was in progress. It had been long laid down that the rites to be performed at each stage should be accompanied by a particular tempo of drums. The Potti got the Maaraar playing on the drum on

3. *Bhootam - Irascible spirit.*



his side and made him play the wrong beat, confusing the inexperienced child into performing the rites that went with that drum beat but which were not of the prescribed order and thus in error. This led to the immediate manifestation of the enraged Bhootam who was being propitiated. Roaring in rage, he grabbed the terrified Brahmin child and started to rise into the skies. Meanwhile the senior Namboodiripad had returned and, suspecting foul play, immediately started posthaste to Thiruvananthapuram, which he reached a little after the young Namboodiri had already commenced the festival rites. As the Namboodiripad leapt into the *Padma Teertham* for his purificatory bath, he heard the sound of the drum being played in error and knew that the worst would have occurred. Rushing into the Temple he saw the Bhootam rising up to the sky with the Namboodiripad boy in his hands. Without wasting a second, the senior Tantri cut his own thumb and offered the blood to the Bhootam. Immediately appeased, the spirit accepted the blood and released the boy. Thenceforth the Tantries in conclave decided to do away with this dangerous rite. While *Sreebhootabeli* is performed to the divinities, the *Beli* to this potent spirit by the Tantries got discontinued. The angry Namboodiripad further punished the Bhootam for his inability to realise the helplessness and inexperience of a young boy and decreed that out of the ten days each of the festival twice a year, the Bhootam would be given food (*Havissu*) for nine days but by non Brahmins only and on the tenth day, which is the day of the *Arat* procession, it would starve. A place is given for the Bhootam in front of the western *Unjal Mandapam* for this *Beli*. It is also known as *Peyadichan Mandapam* and the engravings of the Bhootam and the Namboodiripad are seen there.

### Sree Narasimha Swamy – Instances of Great Grace

Oral tradition offers two incidents of the direct grace of Sree Narasimha Swamy in favour of the Royal Family illustrating His aspect of vast mercy, despite His basic ferocity of nature. The Maharaja in question was Sree Swathi Thirunal. The Nambi of the Sree Narasimha Swamy shrine is said to have given the *Teertham* (sacred water) to the Maharaja and had added poison in it with the specific intention to kill him. Though he suspected foul play due to the changed colour of the *Teertham* and the obvious agitation on the face of the priest, the King is said to have taken the sacred water in all veneration and faith. Immediately the priest was seen rushing out of the shrine holding his head with his hands and collapsing on the ground. In a matter of minutes he had become blue in colour as though from severe poisoning and died thereafter. The King left the Temple totally unharmed.

The second instance took place in the backdrop of the *Arat* procession. Due to the machinations of enemies, an elephant was made to get agitated and charge straight ahead right on the route of the King as he walked in procession. The attendants scattered to the sides in panic but the King, Sree Swathi Thirunal,



is reported to have stood steadfast with his eyes boring into the charging animal. As it neared him, it started to tremble and came to an abrupt halt, slowly sinking to the ground with its head bent low. Eye witnesses claimed that superimposed on the Maharaja was the fearsome figure of a bristling lion, tongue hanging out and claws raised in readiness to attack. The lion was none other than Sree Narasimha Swamy, who had Himself manifested to save His great devotee. (The lion, it must be remembered, is the natural foe of the elephant).<sup>4</sup>

## Other Incidents

One more story is available regarding the elephant episode. Following the upheaval caused by this beast during the ceremony, some of the jewels of the God fell into the sea. The traditional Christian fishermen families, who used to form a semi circle of protection from Marthanda Varma's days (Refer Modern History) retrieved them from the water. The Tantri hesitated to take them. Sree Swathi Thirunal declared, "*Just as I rule these sands, they rule the sea. Please receive the ornaments back from them.*" The directive was obeyed.

A little known incident of Sree Vishaghom Thirunal's brief but brilliant reign is presented. During the *Murajapam*, reports reached him that one of the participating Namboodiries was seen playing cards by himself inside the Temple while the others prayed. The furious ruler had the Namboodiri produced before him. The man took out all the 52 cards and recited an apt stanza in praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy for each of the 52 cards. The Maharaja appreciated his ingenuity in devotion and, instead of censuring, rewarded him handsomely.

## Events of the Recent Past

Coming to the very recent past, to the era of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma, a few incidents are included here. Today many people remember these events but with the passage of time they could assume the character of legends with a question mark suspended over them. To avoid such a contingency they are narrated here.

The fire of 1110 ME/1934 AD is an undoubted fact. Records of the same are easily available. Starting from the *Vilakku Madom* (encircling area for lighting lamps) the flames licked themselves into a rapidly spreading mighty force, and reached up to the *Belikkal* section near to which Sree Hanuman Swamy towered. There are people alive even today who had witnessed the vision of a majestic Hanuman, mace in hands, standing near this idol and keeping the encroaching fire at bay with the fire of His eyes. Those blessed persons who saw this form immediately gained the conviction that the fire would be brought under Sree Hanuman's control and that was what exactly happened. The fire did not spread any further.

---

4. Another opinion exists that the ruler in question was Maharaja Uthrom Thirunal and not his elder brother Maharaja Swathi Thirunal.



While all this was taking place, panic-stricken priests of the Temple rushed inside to save the lovely vehicles of the Deities stored nearby and some sped further inside. In an attempt to remove the idol of Sree Narasimha Swamy to safety they kicked at the closed doors of the sanctum to break them open. At that moment an *Asareeri* was heard: "*Do not fear, the fire will not reach here.*" Immediately after, they heard with utmost relief that the fire was under control.

Written narrations state that as soon as the news of the fire reached the Palace, Sree Chithira Thirunal and his mother Maharani Setu Parvathi Bayi rushed to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The Maharaja went to the *Bhadradeepappura* and prayed with great distress to Sree Padmanabha Swamy to extinguish the flames. He also made some offerings for the same. In a very short time his heartfelt plea was answered and the fire suddenly died out.

It is doubtful whether the following couple of incidents have proof in writing. They are being reproduced here as they were told to the author – readers are free to draw their own conclusions.

Both the episodes have interconnections. The conch with the right side formation (which is of great value in many ways) which is used for worship with water for Sree Padmanabha Swamy slipped out of the hands of the Namboodiripad and fell into the sea during the rituals of one *Arat*. Though it was retrieved by the grace of God, it was taken as a very bad omen. This was just before the abolition of the local mint of Travancore State with its own coins like *Chakram*, *Kasu* etc. These coins had always been considered by the local people as symbols of plenty and prosperity and were all along deemed as Sree Padmanabha's own money. Travancore was then a prosperous and progressive State. The sudden collapse of one floor of the centuries – old *Gopuram* on the east of this Temple coincided with this event.

There is yet another true incident which could with passage of time become labelled as a figment of someone's imagination. The present Valia Thampuram, Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, has himself personal knowledge of the same. The setting is the Second World War of 1939-1945, when rationing of edible commodities was in force. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple's needs were, however, being met as usual though the procurement had to be through the Governmental set-up and not from the open market. Due to some slip somewhere the Temple authorities found that the sugar procurement had not been made and there was not sufficient sugar to see through the whole of the next day. It was already past office time and the next day, apart from being a holiday, the rationing officer would be out of station. This meant that the full quota of food offerings could not be submitted to the Perumal. The distressed Temple officials were at their wits' end as to how to solve the problem, when the rationing officer himself contacted the Temple. He had cancelled his



out-station programme and was staying back as something appeared to be insistently telling him that his services would be in urgent demand for the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. He got the depot specially opened and the sugar released thus made possible the offering as usual.

The appearance of snakes of high breed during many periods of time including the reasonably near past, when the security or stability of the Temple came under threat, has been passed down through chronicles and word of mouth. They would just appear and after transmitting by their very presence the warnings they wished to convey, would disappear into nowhere. In visible or invisible form they have been considered as the guardians of the moral and material wealth of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

In 1960 it was decided to re-do the mural paintings of the Temple. For this purpose Karumanparambathu Achuthan Nair and his assistant, the famous Mummiyoor Krishnankutty Nair, were got down from Mummiyoor. They started the work and when they reached the south-western corner outside the sanctum they came to the painting of the Sundara Yakshi standing under an areca palm tree. By mistake the Yakshi was painted as Sala Yakshi as she was standing under a palm tree (and not areca palm). The former concept projects the gentle, while the latter a more fiercesome aspect. While working on it Achuthan Nair experienced some inexplicable physical discomfort but in his eagerness to finish the work, he persisted and completed it. Thereupon he fell unconscious and later on returned home without doing further paintings. An astrological prediction on this ailment revealed that some error had been committed in the work undertaken at the Temple. Subsequently the work was re-commissioned under the expert hand of Krishnankutty Nair but due to a most unfortunate turn of events he too passed away. Finally after performing propitiatory rites the work was undertaken by his disciples. The Yakshi, whose presence they felt, was to become Sundara Yakshi once more as a result of consultations with the astrologers. This is an event of proven authenticity.

An occurrence that took place in the year 1994 was that a serpent was seen spread across the doorway of the Sree Agrashala Ganapathy shrine. All efforts to get it to move proved futile. Finally the priest approached it and requested "*Will you please be good enough to move?*" Immediately it moved away and disappeared.

So run the folklore, legends, and unusual happenings of this Temple, may be more remain; and despite the possible exaggerations at places it cannot and should not be forgotten that their origin is in factual occurrences. Without them, the related institution would stand deprived of much charm to the ordinary man.



## 10

## ABODE OF THE DIVINE

## Structure, Sculpture, Architecture and Art

It indeed fills the minds of mere mortals with awe to dwell on the extent of vision and vastness of concept, enriched by the nectar of devotion of those who master-minded, engineered and executed the physical evolution of these magnificent abodes of the Gods. The temples stand witness to the magnitude of man's superior capacities in service and dedication to the Supreme Power whose worship by him is demonstrated by these splendid structures wrought out of his labour of love.

The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple holds a place of pride on the canvas of temple construction. It has been described as a treasure-house of art by many. The plethora of artistic embellishments is truly dazzling. Stella Kramrisch (*"The Form of the Sculptures"*, chapter IV) specifically writes about this Temple thus. *"It has preserved the latest relics of best tradition of stone sculpture in the State and is the receptacle of some of the finest examples of the Sculptor's art of the 18th century. The major sculptures especially have vitality, at the same time possess poise and restraint."* Sculpture is said to be the ornamentation of a Deity. If that be so, Maha Vishnu who is described as *Alankara Priya* or one very fond of decoration and who is the presiding Deity of the Temple, is indeed exquisitely ornamented with the sculptures.

The architectural layout possesses certain unique features. According to the norms, the *Natakashala* (place where the performing arts take the stage) should be in the south-east, the *Agni Konu*, but this rule has not been followed in this Temple. Normally, Maha Ganapathy, the remover of all obstacles, who is the Elephant-God, is given a seat of prime importance; that place seems to be reserved for Vishvakshenan here. Another significant variation is seen in the



placement of the *Mandapam* outside the sanctum sanctorum. In almost all temples except the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Thiruvattar Sree Adi Kesava Temple,<sup>1</sup> which closely resemble each other, immediately after the sanctum are the steps known as *Sopanam* leading down to the floor. After a small space the *Namaskara Mandapam* (front platform), facing the shrine, is situated. In the case of this Temple, this *Mandapam*, which is the famed *Ottakkal Mandapam* (platform made of a single stone), becomes a continuation of the sanctum in concept due to the absence of these steps separating it from the shrine. The multiplicity of *Mandapams* within the premises is yet another characteristic which invites attention. There are at least fourteen of them of different proportions and range of decorations. Another feature is that the imposing eastern pagoda follows its own calculations in physical proportions. The floors of the tower of the *Raja Gopuram* are restricted to seven instead of the usual fourteen (Refer chapter *The Inner Radiance*).

The compactness of this Temple is exceptional. The many shrines within its precincts are easy reach. Artists within the different systems worked on the *Dhyana Slokas* which are spelt out in the canons for specific image construction. The verses were mainly from the *Agamas*, *Silparetnam*, *Eesana Gurudeva Padhathi* and other Sanskrit texts though deviations are noticed off and on due to the influence of local tradition. They are invariably composed from revelations to sages through their spiritual insight.

Display of art in this Temple other than the grand sculptures and engravings worked on granite base are two-fold static and active art. Like so many other temples, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has its own wealth of mural paintings mainly concentrated in certain areas. These were done with vegetable dyes. A detailed descriptive account of the same will come later. These paintings form part of static art. Active art flourished in a big way and the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple offered a ready platform for display of many a different art and skill. It is on record that 99 arts or *Arangams* flourished here. From the old Temple records it has been possible to collect the names of 51 of these art forms. Now, unfortunately, only a handful continue.

In this chapter, structure, sculpture and architecture are being dealt with simultaneously while the arts are being considered separately.

The typical Kerala temple features are underlined by the structure of the *Sreekovil* (sanctum sanctorum), the *Chuttambalam*, the *Belikkal* area, the

1. 1. *Sree Padmanabha Swamy reclines with head to the south and feet in the direction of the north as it with regard to Sree Adi Kesava Perumal. These two divine Representations are said to recline gazing at each other.*
2. *The Parthivapuram Vishnu Temple is considered by experts as one of the oldest temples in Kerala. The idol is in standing posture. The local legends state that it stands facing the west, face to face with Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram.*



*Dhwaja Sthambham* and the *Chuttu Vilakku* or encircling lamps and the *Thirumuttam* (sacred open courtyards) while the Dravidian style is projected by the huge *Gopuram* (tower) abounding with figures and decorations. This Tamil character is only natural as South Travancore had close cultural affinity with nearby Tamil Nadu regions. Moreover many parts of southern Tamil Nadu including Thirunelveli were very often under the rule of the Travancore Kings. Marthanda Varma himself had grown up in South Travancore and was well exposed to Tamil influence. As such, blending of Tamil culture in the Temple construction was unavoidable and inevitable. This Temple and the Suchindrom Temple seem to be the only two ancient Temples in erstwhile Travancore exhibiting the blending of Tamil (Dravidian) and local Kerala styles of architecture.<sup>2</sup> Since this Temple too came directly under the temple tradition set down by the Namboodiri Brahmins of Kerala, it was able to retain its basic originality even though the Dravidian ideas and influences inspired structural patterns. The Nayik influence is evident in the figures though many exhibit a distinct local flavour. As such the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is a happy amalgamation of the Dravidian, Chola and Pandya as well as the indigenous Kerala styles of architecture which complement and not contradict each other.

The four South Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra basically have the same iconography, but each has its own character. The Kerala icons have sharp features and minimum ornamentation. There is much stress on details in the Tamil Nadu work and even muscles and veins are depicted. The towers rise high. Andhra went for more willowy, stylised, *lasya* forms and Karnataka for heavier figures with emphasis on jewellery and hair arrangements.

By and large the structures seen today in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple stand as a monument to the devotion and conceptional magnificence of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma, the Maker of Modern Travancore, who ruled the land till 933 ME/1758 AD. It is necessary to emphasize that Marthanda Varma only repaired and renovated the existing structures; he did not change the original nature by re-modelling but faithfully preserved the ancient character. The novelty was ushered in only in the additions he had made. One deviation from the conservatism he followed in the building activity was in the utilisation of granite instead of wood which is the normally accepted medium in Kerala. This was to minimise fire hazard which was not uncommon in the Temple. This change had been accepted and permitted by the *Yogam* after the great fire of 861 ME/1686 AD, in the time of King Iravi Varma. Despite acutely adverse and danger-fraught circumstances made all the more stressful due to the many wars of expansion, Marthanda Varma would personally supervise even the small details of renovation and construction of

2. *Temples of South India, Government of India Publication Division referred to in Kerala Chariithram Vol. II Page 939.*



the Temple which held his heart in its total control. After he passed away, his illustrious successor, Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma completed some of the unfinished areas like the two top floors of the eastern *Gopuram* and made his own additions, the most fantastic being the gorgeous *Kulasekhara Mandapam*. Many of the subsequent rulers did not have to carry out any large-scale construction because of the perfection bestowed on this aspect by these two eminent Kings though in some way or the other they made their own contributions adding to the name and wealth of this Temple. The next large-scale renovation was done only during the time of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma of lasting fame, who reached the lotus feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in the year 1166 ME/1991 AD.

Based on certain available data it is concluded that the workmen who worked in Temples like Thrikkanomkodu, which is one of the hundred and eight *Thiruppathies* like the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and is situated in Valliyoor, as well as in temples in Thirunelveli like the Nellaippan Koil and who were acclaimed masters of their art, were invited to work in this Temple. There is nothing extraordinary in this as apart from other aspects these places had come under the yoke of Venad repeatedly. There are evidences to establish that the sculptors and their assistants went on to work in other temples in Travancore like Varkalai, Thiruvattar (another of the 108 *Thiruppathies*) etc.

## Physical Structure, Architecture and Sculpture

The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple dominates the areas surrounding it, radiating an indefinable magnetism. Facing the east, it rests at a moderate elevation on about seven acres of land looking out on to broad highways with a view which at one time offered an uncluttered vista stretching up to the Agasthyakutam Peak. The Temple is enclosed within four high granite walls of considerable girth, which are of such prominence that one of the references to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple continues to be *Mathilakam*, 'that which is inside the walls'. These walls measure twenty feet in height on the eastern side and fifteen feet on the other three sides. Engravings are found scattered here and there on the inner and outer sides of these majestic walls. Even if they may not collectively qualify for special excellence of workmanship, they display the love for decoration of the artisans of yore. Figures, animals and patterns mainly small in dimensions appear, at times in isolation and at other times clustered in a group. However two among them invite attention. On the outer eastern wall near the *Chempakathumoottu Nata*, young Markandeya clasping the *Siva Lingam* is chiselled.<sup>50</sup> In stronger relief and attracting His own share of veneration is a Sastha standing in an apparently exuberant mood, engraved on the exterior side of the southern wall. A lamp is lit daily in the morning and evening and *Chirappu* conducted in His honour on the 41st day of the Sabarimala fast (*Mandalam*). All these are by public



participation. There are four main entrances facing the four directions with four smaller ones, three on the eastern side and one on the northern side of these, one of the eastern entrances known as *Chempakathumoottu Nata* and the medium sized entrance, the *Sreepadam Nata* in the north corner were reserved exclusively for the kings and the ladies of the royalty respectively. The engravings on the inner side of the *Mathilakom* walls are only being touched upon. When the eastern interior wall carries a Siva Bhootam, Vyali, a demonic figure with face in the stomach concluded to be Asura Kabandham of the Ramayanam age and Dakshinamoorthy, the southern *Padippura* area displays Dwarapalakas, Meghadhoothas or levitating sages singing praises, floral patterns, *Siva Lingam* with serpents on guard, squalting monkey and two monkey wrestlers possibly Bali and Sugreeva, Sree Rama and a devotee of that tribe, bust of Hanuman holding a base on which Sree Rama sits and near the doorway a Deepalakshmi unusually standing on the top of a Bhootam, birds, lion, Rama bending the bow, celestial damsel, floral designs and so on. The western wall adjacent wall to the *Padippura* carries a tortoise, Bhootam and a female figure. The northern wall is big and large bare except perhaps for the Deepalakshmis flanking the *Nata*. The ceiling of the massive *Sivelippura* has a abundance designs of fish possibly the royal *Makara Matsyam*, Vaishnavite emblems and prostrating figures. Special attention is invited to a carving on the western *Sivelippura* ceiling which is an example of the merit of the workmanship. The forms of an elephant and a bull are worked in such a way as to be interlocked with interchanging faces when viewed from different angles.

The four main entrances are situated in the mid-portion of the walls. The majestic Temple *Gopuram* is situated at the eastern entrance, which is only appropriate as the direction of the Temple itself is eastward facing, in conformity with the main consecrated Deities who all face east. It is structurally Dravidian signifying Tamil influence in an impressive manner. Since Travancore with Sree Padmanabha Swamy as its Monarch had extensive Tamil speaking areas under it, such an acceptance and major amalgamation could have contributed to closer emotional integration of the two linguistic territories. Thirteen broad and very long steps lead to the main imposing entrance. It is believed that originally they were eighteen in number and that five of them have got buried in the sand (Refer chapter *The Inner Radiance*). Just outside the Temple portico two bronze eight-tiered lamps or *Deepa Sthambhas* stand in line. This type of lamp is a must in Kerala temples. Two elegantly worked pillars support the portico roof on which sport mythical figures and of course the legendary *Vyali*. Two large-sized *Vyalies* take their place at this main entrance on its either side. This lion-headed figure too is essential in Kerala Temple architecture.

Adjacent to the eastern flight of steps of this Temple and a little to the left nestles the main tank by name *Padma Teertham* of far flung fame which finds



a place even in the sacred *Bhagavatha Puranam*. It contains within it an unusual number of *Mandapas*, nine in all out of which one is big in size and the rest of medium proportions. Within its railings are situated two small temples which have already featured in the chapter *God's Domain*.

Entrance through the central portion of the portico brings one to the lofty and spacious hall known as the *Natakashala Mukhappu*. South Indian Temples were necessarily centres of art and culture. As the name itself suggests, this was the avenue where dance, dramas, musical recitals, and other art forms as well as rendering of scriptures, discussions on them and other learned discourses took place. The hall is one hundred and twenty feet long and forty eight feet wide. It is divided lengthwise into three sections, the middle portion being the widest with two raised platforms on either side for spectators to be accommodated. There is a specially constructed room in wood on a raised area to one side with carving and fretwork, for lady members of the Royal Family to sit and watch the proceedings. Four rows of ten fluted pillars each are seen in the hall, moderately carved with animal and floral designs and on top of each pillar sits a *Vyali* that apparently supports the roof.

The foundation for the imposing *Gopuram* was laid in the time of King Adithya Varma way back in 741 ME/1565 AD. The Temple records reveal that the foundation goes forty feet in depth. The *Gopuram* itself rises to about one hundred feet and carries seven gold globe like structures with sharp points on each of them. They are called *Thazhikkutams*. One peculiarity of this beautiful edifice is that the base is much broader than normally required by the height. The *Gopuram* is made up of brick, lime and mortar on granite base and is seven storied with steps leading right up to the top. As mentioned previously, the first five floors were finished during the time of Marthanda Varma and the balance of two during the time of his nephew Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma (The reason for restricting the number of stories to seven has been dealt with in the chapter *The Inner Radiance*). Right on top of the *Gopuram* there rests a boat-shaped ornamentation, which was specially made as per the orders of Maharaja Karthika Thirunal to highlight certain ideas which are threefold.

(1) As the most obvious symbol of Vanchi Nadu, which is another appellation for this State, the *Vanchi* or boat itself is displayed. As an additional point, it is to be recollected that even far back as the days of Sangramadheera Ravi Varma, the first recorded adoption to the dynasty was done by him from Kola Swaroopam, That *Swaroopam* derived its name *Kola*, which translates as 'boat' as its members first arrived from Heheya Nadu to Kerala by boat. From then on all adoptions to the Thrippappoor Royal House, barring the last, were directly from Kola Swaroopam. Its connection with the term *Vanchi* is thus clear.

(2) *Vanchi* also means a treasury where wealth, which is indicative of prosperity, is contained. The Temple represented the collective prosperity of the State of



Travancore. (3) In Sanskrit, one of the terms for prosperity is *Sree* and another *Lakshmi*, synonyms of the names of the Goddess of wealth and prosperity — Mahalakshmi — consort of Vishnu or Sree Padmanabha Swamy. This expansion can also be connected to the term *Vanchi* with its connotations of plenty.

In the first floor of the *Gopuram* is a mini museum, but all the other floors are bare. Each one has a window-like opening in the centre, which is lit up every evening. It presents a visual of peace and divinity even from afar. Every doorway in all the seven stories is guarded by two *Dwarapalakas* (guards or door-keepers) in miniature proportions. The beauty of it is that each pair registers different emotions. From the top floor, a panoramic and enchanting view of the city of the Lord of Ananta, spreads like a feast before the eyes. On the seventh floor of the *Gopuram*, which is its topmost floor, on the western side of the pagoda, a small barred opening exists. It is through this that people get on top of the tower to repair it or polish the *Thazhikkutams*.

Like the later Chola period constructions, on all the four sides, protruding columns have been worked out in the central area of the *Gopuram*. The intricately executed base of the *Gopuram* displays themes from the Hindu *Puranas*. On the northern side the *Leelas* (play) of Lord Krishna, especially of His childhood, are depicted in great detail. Sree Rama's coronation on the southern side and the *Desavatharam* or the ten incarnations of Maha Vishnu on the eastern side and *Ramayanam*, *Bhagavatham*, *Mahabharatham* epic stories on the western side are presented with a wealth of expert craftsmanship. The brick and stucco material invests these figures with life-like qualities and expressions. <sup>Two thousand odd figures and figurines are incorporated in the Gopuram.</sup>

The other three entrances are much smaller and simpler. They are double storied and the utilisation of wood is seen in the rooms on the second floor of these half towers. While the south and west entrances stand on a par with the ground, the north entrance used by the other members of the Royal Family, is comparatively impressive with six well-laid broad granite steps leading up to it.

Descending down to the floor level of the eastern *Gopuram*, the steps terminate on one of the two raised platforms which are located on either side of the massive doors that open out on to a central passage later on reaching the Temple courtyard. Two huge *Dwarapalakas* of the Lord, Jayan and Vijayan, are depicted in great detail, complete with fangs and they present a fearsome appearance as they tower on these two platforms. A pair of single stones, one vertical and the other horizontal, make up the main door-frame. Four elephant heads with raised trunks pretend to support the weight of the *Gopuram* on their backs.



The walls of the entrance corridor beneath the *Gopuram* have many artistic representations in high relief as well, conveying moral lessons dealing with the basic physical urges of man and the negative and base side of his character, bringing to the mind the importance of sense control, which differentiates him from the animal species. Many of the episodes relating to Sree Krishna also feature here like Kuchela's tale, Krishna as the butter thief, *Gajendra-moksham* (salvation of the Elephant King), Krishna subduing the dreaded serpent Kaliyan and so on. Hanuman, the Monkey-God, Sree Ramachandra, the *Chakram* which is the disc of Maha Vishnu and His weapon of tremendous potency are seen next, to be followed by a fine representation of the favourite vehicle of the Lord, the Garuda bird, wherein the pose of the head, the neck muscles and general stance are perfectly executed. The other figures also capture and project life-like expressions and moods exceedingly well.

Next comes the small corridor which connects the areas described as the *Sreebelippura* or *Sivelippura*. This corridor is eighteen feet broad and twenty feet long and has six pillars with ladies with lamps dressed and decorated in Kerala style, sculpted on them. On the first pillar on the left side, facing north stands in high relief a well-finished figure of the chief *Sthapati* or sculptor Ananta Padmanabha Moothashari with folded hands. On the other sides of the pillar are seen his wife, son, daughter and brother as well as replicas to scale of the tools like the hammer, chisel, balance, measuring rod etc. used by him. A detailed narration of this figure will appear soon after the *Sivelippura* is described.

On quite a few counts, the expansive *Sivelippura* as the *Sreebelippura* is commonly known, is one of the masterpieces seen in this Temple. It continues to be hailed as a wonder even to this day, and is believed to have its basis in the science of numerology. It is a rectangular corridor fully open at the sides and covered on top, running all around the inner areas containing the sanctum and other places, with open spaces separating the two portions. A very impressive appearance is offered because of the sheer expanse of its size and the work that has gone into it, glorifying it for all time. *Sivelippura* is common to most of the major temples though the proportions vary. The *Sivelippura* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple measures three hundred and fourteen feet or ninety six meters from east to west and four hundred and six feet and three inches or one hundred and twenty five meters from north to south and is twenty feet broad and twenty three feet high. The roof is a feat in itself and its ceiling paved with huge granite slabs. (The *Sivelippura* seen in the Sree Rameswaram Siva Temple resembles this one in style so much that there is a doubt if there was a connection in inspiration between the two. Definite links existed between that Temple of Siva at Rameswaram and the Travancore Dynasty down the ages continuing to the present, so this similarity could be more than a



coincidence). All along the two sides of the *Sivelippura* stand the majestic granite pillars, three hundred and forty two and one fourth in number, the one fourth being in memory of the main mason who built it. As per another method of counting which splits the double pillars as well, the number of the pillars produces a total of three hundred and sixty five, one for each day of the year with the one fourth in memory of the master craftsman. This is the more popularly accepted calculation. All the pillars are carved out of single blocks of stones, roughly twenty feet high and are crowned with lion's heads, or the *Vyali* or Chinese dragons. The side of each pillar facing the *Sivelippura* has a *Deepalakshmi* (female figure carrying a lamp in her cupped hands). Her eyes are closed in a mood of intense meditation of her Lord. While all the *Deepalakshmis* conform to a set pattern, two of them in the eastern corridor alone are strikingly different. Unlike the other figures where the lamp is held close to the body these two appear with lamps held in their upraised hands. Such *Deepalakshmis* are rare. The lamps can hold up four ounces of oil, enough to burn a wick for four hours. Rows of iron lamps fixed between the pillars and hanging brass lamps add to the beauty of these corridors. The other three sides are engraved with figures of gods, animal forms, designs and patterns. The images are compact and confined well within pre-determined spaces. No two pillars are identical in ornamentation. Figures in long frockcoats are also occasionally seen and they could perhaps be *Dewans* in official attire. On one or two pillars the ingenuity of craftsmanship comes to play in the combination of two animal figures into one figure which appear as one or the other when viewed from different positions.

In the centre of the eastern *Sivelippura* with the *Dhwaja Sthambham* in the background, on the floor one notices a sculpted slab of two male figures with a *Chakram* in the middle. They are identified as Ayyappa Deekshithar, tutor of the Royal House, and Vaidyalingam, an important functionary of the Temple titled *Anavaal*, who was also a beloved disciple of Deekshithar. They are given this position so that the vehicles bearing the Gods would pass over them, so also many devotees. The touch of a devotee's feet is regarded as a benediction.

There is a record of interest in connection with this *Sivelippura* which could be included in the stories and narrations connected with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple but which is being introduced here to provide continuity to this background.

Once when it was time to take the Deities out for the *Siveli* procession during the Temple festival, the rains came down in full force. Maharaja Marthanda Varma was deeply distressed that the Deities would get drenched. That time the procession had no alternative but to be fully exposed to the elements. The Maharaja then made a resolution that should he have the blessings



of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, by the time the next festival commenced, he would have a covered way got ready for this procession. It is a chronicled fact that this structure of formidable dimensions was completed in a record period of six months with four thousand expert sculptors and six thousand labourers working full time, assisted by a hundred elephants. The Maharaja's desire was thus fulfilled. Delighted with the dedication of the head sculptor, the King asked the man to name his reward. The sculptor asked for no remuneration but requested that he and his family find a permanent place in the Temple by having their likeness preserved in it. He also submitted that he be given a place from where he would be able to see the Lord with his left eye and the Maharaja with his right eye at the same time. Accordingly the Maharaja chose the first southern pillar on the left side of the small connecting passage way between the *Sivelippura* and the *Mukhappu* to sculpt these figures. From this position during the *Deeparadhana* at the eastern entrance when the God is taken out for *Siveli* and the King stands at the pre-determined spot for worship, it would be possible for one to see the Lord with the left eye and the King with the right eye. He was also given many gifts which included the *Attathodu Vala*, a thick gold bangle having a special design on it and this was a symbol of honour.

As already recorded, the *Sivelippura* running the entire outer area of the shrine is a continuous corridor primarily used for the *Sreebeli* procession. It was also used to seat the Brahmins for collective prayers on special occasions and to conduct mass food distribution for them. Due to its grand dimensions it could accommodate two thousand people at a time. The big stone box-like structures with wooden lids seen along these corridors were used till recent times when Brahmin feeding was a regular feature, to store buttermilk for them to drink during meal time.

Since the physical structure is the foundation for the artistic display whether it be architecture, sculpture or art, the construction continues to go side by side with elaborations of the above mentioned aspects.

As one proceeds southwards, from the spot in front of the flag staff, which is mid point of the eastern corridor, immediately on the western inner area rests the famed *Kulasekhara Mandapam* enclosed with flat wooden railings. It proudly presents an exquisite collection of sculptures, the excellence of skill and richness of variety being such that it demands a separate section of its own, which will be included when the description of the *Sivelippura* and other structures on either side of it in the exterior area is complete and we once more reach the starting point. A little ahead on the east across the open courtyard spread with fine white sand, touching the wall is a long covered structure open at the three sides where certain persons like members of officers' families could stand and watch the processions. Further on is a comparatively narrow corridor to the left, going eastwards with pillars representing the *Desavatharam*



or ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu and other divinities as well as motif and floral designs. It connects the *Sivelippura* to the private entrance used only by the Maharaja initially and in course of time by the other members of the Royal Family. This entrance is well known as the *Chempakathumoottu Nata*. An interesting anecdote exists about this entrance and it is mentioned in the chapter *Legends and Folklore*. The double doors carved with lotuses and sporting brass decorations in a beautifully carved slender door frame are much smaller in width and height compared to the main entrances. It had been intentionally made thus to underline the aspect of humility by necessitating the automatic lowering of the head when the King enters the Temple premises through this small door.

Immediately on reaching the southern *Sivelippura*, in the open courtyard on the left one of the four *Unjal Mandapams* (platforms on which visiting dignitaries and relations of the royalty are accommodated). The pattern of this pillared platform in two levels is repeated in the other three *Unjal Mandapams* also. Many figures of Gods and sages and designs are seen on them in subdued relief and modest dimensions. A small representation of the *Anantasayanam* appears on a pillar. One interesting figure is of a person, presumably a watchman, stick in hand, sleeping while on duty. When not used for special events, they were platforms for presenting temple arts, for discourses and learned discussions.

A small pathway to the side of this structure leads to a tiled building in two parts standing shoulder to shoulder with the southern wall. The first part houses a temple in wood, a rough replica of the eastern side of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple itself, containing the Idols of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and other Deities worshipped by Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma in his personal *Puja* (Revert to *The Inner Radiance and Modern History*).

The second part is of older utilisation and is the *Homappura* constructed with a huge *Homa Kundam* (deep pit) for the conduct of the *Maha Ganapathy Homam* twice a year. In bygone days this oblation to Lord Ganapathy, the Elephant God and remover of all obstacles, was done to propitiate Him with ten thousand and eight coconuts each time. Now the number has dwindled to a thousand and eight.

Close by stand two granite pillars commonly referred to as *Thulabhakkal* (stone pillars) used for *Thulabharam*. This offering involves weighing a person against the commodity specified in a submission to the Deity. These stone pillars had scales attached to them and were used by the kings for the famous and expensive *Thulapurusha Danam* wherein they were weighed against gold coins. This offering was an unavoidable part of the rituals which had to be performed by them before assuming the ancient title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'.



Other members of the Royal Family also were allowed to use these scales for the similar offering though they were not weighed against gold.

The *Bhadradeepappura* is situated to the western side of these pillars. A *Salagrama* of great potency was buried here during the time of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma and an elaborate ritual known as *Bhadradeepam* was conducted for success in the conquest of Kayamkulam, a territory in central Travancore ruled by its own ruler. Marthanda Varma emerged victorious and Kayamkulam became part of Travancore. The conduct of *Kalabham* related to it is an ongoing ritual.

The Temple well comes next. Water from this well is used exclusively for the religious requirements of the Temple. Only the priests are allowed to touch it and to draw water from it. Exactly opposite to this well, which is in an enclosed area and across the southern *Sivelippura* on the right side, is a small courtyard beyond which is a covered space flanked with the *Valia Madappally* (big kitchen) on one side used for large-scale cooking and the offices of the *Sreekaryakar* and assistant *Sreekaryakar* who come third and fourth in the hierarchy of the day to day administration of the Temple office. In line with the *Bhadradeepappura* and after the well are seen the store rooms and connected offices. In the middle of the southern *Sivelippura*, to the left, is situated the second entrance, the southern gate of the Temple with its two storied *Patippura*.

Immediately ahead of this running corridor to the right is situated the shrine of the centuries old Sree Dharma Sashta at the *Kanni-moola*. This Sashta idol is rare *Swayambhu*-which has manifested itself from the ground. The *Vimanam* (top portion) of the circular construction is delicately embellished with many celestial figures of varying sizes and tapers towards the top. Around the outer walls of this shrine are fixed wooden frames with lamp holders attached to them for the *Chuttu Vilakku*, the lighting of which had always been an important procedure of this Temple. The shrine itself is two the roomed and the idol of Sree Sashta, in the typical sitting posture of *Yoga*, is of black stone. Once murals were seen in this shrine but they no longer exist. There is a belief that a cellar exists near the shrine with an underground escape route to the beach.

At the beginning of the western corridor, which continues from the southern corridor, stands the western *Unjal Mandapam*. One of the notable engravings among others on various subjects depicts the Bhootam (demon) soaring up with the Namboodiri child from the Tarananalloor family. (For further details, see chapters, *Worship of the Celestials* and *Legends and Folklore*). There is another name given to this *Mandapam*, which is *Peyadichan Mandapam* in local jargon. The *Beli* for the demon is offered in front of this *Mandapam* during the bi-annual festivals.



The middle of the western *Sivelippura* is a spot of sacred significance. The second *Deeparadhana* with camphor during the *Alpashi* and *Painkuni* festivals twice a year for ten days during the *Siveli* or inner circumambulation of the Deities is at this place. It is held that the *Syamanthakam* gem of Sree Krishna fame is buried in this spot. Sree Krishna on His *Vahana* joins the procession at this junction during the first round of the *Siveli*.

On the left hand side of the central point of the western *Sivelippura* comes the western *Nata* with the double storied tower, which is seen connected to this corridor by a fairly short one with eight pillars. The procession of the Gods traverses this corridor and goes out through the western gate four times a year, twice for the *Palli Vetta* and twice for the *Arat*. The *Grantha-pura* which is the room housing the collection of *Churunas* is located here. Outside the walls of the western side is a double storied building which holds the administrative offices as a whole, including that of the Executive Officer who is the senior most administrator, after the Maharaja.

Moving further on, this corridor passes very close to the rear side of the Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Temple which comes up on its right with its rectangular structure encircled by the wooden frames carrying the lamp holders. The importance of this Temple inside the main complex, being what it is, is dealt with separately at a later stage.

Two tall seventeen-tiered lamps, *Deepa Sthambhas*, named Rama and Lakshmana, cast in bronze with the base having figures of sages, elephants and snakes and resting on a tortoise, stand in the western *Thirumuttam* between the Sree Sastha and Sree Krishna shrines. A Garuda bird in kneeling posture surmounts each lamp. The proportions of the figures are excellent.

At the corner where the western *Sivelippura* meets the northern one, there is a small paved pathway, now pillared and covered, leading away from it to a private entrance facing north termed the *Sreepadam* entrance used solely by the ladies of the royal household. There is a room just inside this entrance with a wooden fretwork frontage reserved exclusively for them to wait and watch the procession and worship the Deities and their spiritually significant *Deeparadhana* at the western entrance. Bordering this path, to the left of the northern *Sivelippura*, comes the third *Unjal Mandapam* used by the Namboodiri Brahmin dignitaries to witness the *Siveli*. It is also modestly decorated.

The Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Temple continues on the right side of the northern corridor also and it is possible to get a glimpse of the beautiful old carved wooden *Namaskara Mandapam* (front, covered platform) of this Temple. The big *Belikkal* and flag mast, both belonging exclusively to this shrine, come one after the other in front of this *Mandapam*. A little further on a bronze



eleven-tier lamp, reasonably tall but comparatively simple in style, stands in this open northern ground. The Garuda, as is seen elsewhere too, is placed on its top.

On the northern side of this corridor range a long line of buildings or collection of rooms serving different purposes. Some are store rooms and record rooms followed by the *Manga-pura*, which translates as Mango room where up to one lakh unripe mangoes preserved in brine water used to be stored. Even today a sizable quantity is kept for Temple requirements including the daily *Nivedyas*. Every *Nivedyam* is accompanied by the salted unripe mangoes. No Temple feast is complete without this mango. (These mangoes are very good for certain stomach disorders). Facing this room is a big stone platform on which crows were daily fed during the Maharaja's arrival in the Temple. This was known as *Kakka-oottu* (crow feeding) and as a rule two measurers of rice were cooked for this purpose. (Feeding of crows is an accepted practice all over Kerala. Crows have special significance during ceremonies connected with the departed souls). Next in order is the *Koppu-pura* where the *Koppu* or accessories like Temple flags, trappings and the like are stored. The *Enna-pura* (oil room) is adjacent to this room. Different varieties of oil required for various purposes are stored there in huge quantities.

Retracing the steps a little, crossing over to the right side of the northern corridor, beyond the Thiru Ampati complex is a single room where the conveyances of Sree Krishna are brought and decorated for the festivals. The vast open courtyards, partially paved with granite slabs, the remaining portion being spread with fine white sand, are seen in this part as well as in many other areas of the Temple. This is a typical characteristic of the Kerala Temple architectural style.

A short distance ahead, near to the right side of the northern corridor, is the two-roomed small shrine with steps leading to its low entrance, dedicated to the Guardian of this Temple, the Kshetrapalan. The idol is of stone. Murals of vintage decorate the wall. The shrine too has encircling lamps. The roof displays a good many carvings. A handsome granite Garapathy sits in the front chamber.

The central portion of the northern *Sivelippura* is now reached. The northern *Nata* with its two storied tower comes to the left and is more imposing than the southern and western gates. To the right of this middle area is a pillared corridor connecting this *Sivelippura* to the northern gate of the inner area or *Nalambalam* which includes the sanctum sanctorum too. On the side of the roof of the northern *Sivelippura* at the point where the connecting corridor commences, a Garuda of more than medium proportions is fashioned kneeling on one knee, holding a snake in each hand and with snakes across the body.



Reverting to the left portion of the main northern *Sivelippura*, after crossing the entrance on that side, the lofty kitchens and halls utilised for the purpose of massive free food distribution for the Brahmins, are located. Many eminent Brahmins of today recollect with emotion the rice of Sree Padmanabha Swamy which fed them. Brahmins belonging to different categories like scholars, priests, ordinary folk and students derived their daily bread from the *Oottaras* (kitchens) of this great Temple. Apart from the large-scale regular feeding of unprescribed numbers who sought its munificence, hundred and one Namboodiries and hundred and one other Brahmins were daily given food as an offering termed *Namaskaram*, at the same time as the offering of food in a big gold plate was submitted to the Perumal. Today the number has dropped to twelve. With drastic changes in circumstances due to altered times, these vast kitchens remain silent and idle. Enormous grinding stones needing four people to rotate them, and huge metal vessels of expansive measurements are seen here still, as reminders of a golden bygone age of prosperity and charity. A well with excellent water is situated here, which could be used as an alternative water source in case impurity occurred in the main well.

Reaching the end of this corridor, at the north-eastern corner, there is a little covered veranda going to the Agrashala Ganapathy shrine. Fashioned of stone on the eastern outer wall, this Ganesh was more or less like a witness to the proceedings of the massive kitchens but later on came to have His own separate standing with His special shrine of burnished brass. To the right of the entrance room of this shrine stands in two sections a wooden box-like construction or *Ara*, in which paddy was stored for the many requirements of the Temple. This pathway is flanked by the eastern *Unjal Mandapam*, the last of these four platforms with a painting of Sree Ganesh seemingly executed on its back wall. All these platforms are open at the four sides and this one also conforms to the pattern. The painting of Sree Ganesh on the back wall becomes possible as this *Mandapam* alone touches the eastern Temple wall itself which serves as the back wall. This *Unjal Mandapam* stands on the left side at the commencement of the eastern *Sivelippura* with some carvings of a simple nature on it. On the opposite side in the *Thirumuttom* a square well constructed with finely finished granite slabs, is stationed. Water for cooking purposes used to be drawn from it.

Near at hand on the left of this corridor are the store rooms used for keeping odds and ends and materials needed for possible repair work.

The right side of the eastern *Sivelippura* is the vast open courtyard with the frontage of the Thiru Ampati Temple and the other constructions in the background. As one nears the central area of this corridor, on the right comes another *Mandapam* also in two levels. It is currently used for performing the *Thulabharam* offering.



The eastern *Sivelippura* now reaches its midpoint from where this description had taken off initially. This vital junction has the *Natakashala Mukhappu* on its left and the area with the flag staff and big *Beli* stone leading on to the inner areas and to the sanctum itself, on the right. If one stands a little to the right or left of the flag mast, from this eastern corridor itself, one gets the glorious *Darsanam*, (vision) of the God amidst many a glowing lamp, though from afar. The descriptive narration of the imposing *Sivelippura* in full rotation in clockwise direction is thus complete.

The outer circumambulation being concluded, before proceeding to the inner areas, the description of a major construction becomes essential. It is none other than the far-famed *Kulasekhara Mandapam*, or the *Mandapam* of the Thousand Pillars, *Ayiramkal Mandapam* erected under the direction and supervision of Sree Padmanabha Dasa Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma, who succeeded Marthanda Varma. This was done to commemorate the assumption of the ancient title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal' by this ruler. The work started in 933 ME/ 1758AD and it took many years and the untiring services and brilliant workmanship of several master craftsmen to complete this extravaganza in stone with its fabulous stone musical pillars. Stones were cut from Peroorkada in the city of Thiruvananthapuram and also from the rocks of Kulasekharam, near the city. The King would personally supervise the cutting and shifting of the required granite. Temple *Churunas* record many details including financial, about this masterpiece. From them it is seen that Mootha Panikkar Thottathu Ashari famed in the field of sculpture was got down to take up certain specific assignments. Twenty eight pillars for sculpting the *Mandira Moorthies* (temple deities) were brought from Thirumala by men of the Ezhava community who were given the task of reaching them to the Temple. Thirumala is the same geographical area from where the huge single stone for the front *Mandapam* in the innermost shrine was brought. Even after its formal completion, the Temple records state, the work continued.

## The Kulasekhara Mandapam

The *Kulasekhara Mandapam* is a living wonder of granite sculpture, a lavish expression of pure poetry in stone. It continues to evoke admiration and dazzle the mind and eyes of those who pour in to view the array of marvels.

This rectangular structure stands enclosed within a frame work of railings in wood and is extensive in area. The outer boundary has thirty six fairly big, rounded and beautifully worked *Deepalakshmi* figures, wearing gorgeous jewellery. By themselves they are works of art. A small corridor running around the entire inner raised *Mandapam* separates these outer pillars and the main platform which stands at an elevation and is reached by four wooden steps. The sides of the high *Mandapam* are ornamented with patterns and designs,



the bottom level giving the appearance of upturned lotus petals. In the south-western corner of the corridor stands a tall and somewhat conical stone vessel which was used to retain sanctified waters from different sources, in which the Maharaja would immerse himself before the conduct of certain very important religious rituals.

The false ceiling in granite, roofing this spacious enclosed hall, is a standing example of craftsmanship our bygone generations had mastered. The story of the great Indian epic *Ramayanam* is carved all around the top in what gives the appearance of a border of profuse sculptures or carvings in stone. Another exceptional feature is the perfectly proportioned stone bell suspended from a finely finished stone chain from the ceiling in the middle of the *Mandapam*. The actual *Kulasekhara Mandapam* which dominates the hall carries twenty eight pillars embellished with a vast variety of figures containing representations of many divinities with special emphasis on Vishnu and Siva. The wealth of expression and conveyed action as well as the depth of details of ornamentation induced on a non-yielding and rigid base like obdurate granite is nothing short of incredible. Out of the twenty eight, twenty four pillars carry a fascinating array of figures, the central ones with subsidiary ones around, while four pillars are ornamented but without figures. These four are situated at the four corners of the elevated platform, on the southern side of this *Mandapam* at the two ends and similarly at the northern side. These are the famed musical pillars of attractively dressed granite with delicate patterns. Each group possesses nine pillars producing as many musical resonances and one giving the sound of the *Mridangam* or drum. These continue to enchant the crowds.

In the inner border, scenes from yet another famous epic, the *Mahabharatham* are reproduced. The ceiling superbly erected of granite is elaborately decorated, with rows upon rows of lotuses, seven in a line, giving the appearance of a vast lotus carpet. The only break is in the middle from where the granite bell is suspended.

On the four sides of the central elevated platform, on which the twenty eight pillars display their unquestioned glory, from the corner pillars rise four *Vyalies* giving the appearance of bearing the upper portion on their massive heads.

The description of these pillars is attempted only in a modest way. They follow more or less the same structural pattern with the big figure on the side of the pillar facing inward on to the *Mandapam* being the central one, with the right and left side of the pillar also worked in detail, having a top panel each on those two sides. The bottom section and the back portions are filled with designs and patterns which are of a breath-taking variety and beauty. On the top of the back of all the twenty four pillars a Goddess, in all probability Goddess Lakshmi, is presented sitting on a full blown lotus.



In clockwise direction, starting from left to right, the fourteen pillars on the left side of the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* as one faces south, are being dealt with first.

Before embarking on a detailed survey of these pillars, a general overall presentation appears to be in order. Sree Karthika Thirunal adopted the idea of this *Mandapam* of the Tamil country but with his own alterations regarding placement and purpose. This structure is situated on the right side and stands to the south, unlike in the place of its origin, and comes in the place of the *Koothambalam* in Kerala Temple style. Whereas it was used there to perform the *Abhishekam* of the Deities, this 'Hall of Thousand Pillars' was constructed to perform the elaborate ritual famed as *Hiranyagarbham* for the Maharaja who would gain the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'. Using granite as the medium instead of the traditional wood due to fire hazard, which was what his illustrious uncle Marthanda Varma too had done, he got down artisans from the Tamil speaking areas of old Travancore like Thrikkannankudi, Valliyoor and Papanasham. The style of the sculptures is predominantly of Tamil Nadu, the figures having elongated faces and sculpted physical forms. Lighter elements which infuse basic realities into the figures are also seen. They are essential to Kerala art and are in evidence mainly in the subsidiary figures.

*Vishnu* and *Siva* exhibit more or less similar features, as such identification is mainly through the distinctive symbols. For a casual observer the possibility of confusing some of the male and female figures arises due to the gentle aspect in the male forms and royal grandeur in the female forms. The *Deepalakshmi* forms sculpted here are in a mood of sensuous devotion while, perhaps in tune with the times, Marthanda Varma's *Deepalakshmi* sculptures appear more stern and strict in devotion.

*Sree Murugan* forms the central figure of pillar number one. He stands flanked by Valli and Devayani on either side, forming a very attractive trio.

A group of ten, narrow, dressed musical pillars decorated elegantly comes next. They produce different musical notes and one of them generates the sound of percussion instruments. Only eleven temples in India claim to possess such wonderful pillars and out of them, one or two are damaged.

*Siva Shakti Panchakshari* is presented in the third pillar. These two main figures are seated beneath the *Kalpavriksham*. Birds and little animals peep out through the leaves. To the right side of the main pillar Ganesh and a goddess appear on the top portion. The left side of the pillar has Sree Murugan, thus completing the family of Lord Siva. On top of Sree Murugan is a scene from the wrestling bout between Bali and Sugreeva, the two royal monkey brothers, carved in small dimensions.



*Dhyana Maha Vishnu*, which dominates the pillar numbered as four, merits acclaim. Maha Vishnu is in deep meditation or *Dhyanam*. Three sages hover overhead in a posture of devotion as they gaze down on the Lord. On the right and left of this pillar stand two celestials with folded hands, possibly they are attendants of Maha Vishnu. On the top right is Goddess Lakshmi with two sages on Her either side. The top left side shows young Lord Krishna and the Gopies.

*Swayamvara Siva*, the central figure on the next pillar, attracts special attention. He seems at repose and is calm; at the same time the expression hints at the anticipation of the coming event or the satisfaction due to it. As the brother of the bride, Maha Vishnu is positioned on the right side pillar and the top section has Hanuman. The left side shows Brahma (with three heads) while the top area depicts two incarnations of Maha Vishnu - Koorma and Narasimha. Hence this pillar carries *Brahman*, the Supreme Power, in all the concepts – Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

A regal figure of the Goddess of the *Vedas*, *Maha Gayatri* of the Supreme *Gayatri Maha Manthram*, comes next. The female attendants beautifully worked out in detail stand on either side of the pillar. On the top side right is Devi in a ferocious mood complete with eight arms holding the weapons of destruction. On the top left is an interesting figure which repeats itself elsewhere in this hall. It shows Vishnu seated cross-legged and with four arms, in meditation. In this state two of the four arms hold an inverted pot over His own head as He does *Abhishekam* to Himself.

*Maha Lakshmi Gopala* is a rare sculpture of note and is seen on the seventh pillar. The four-armed Vishnu sits carrying a small and exquisite figure of Goddess Lakshmi in two hands while the other two bear the conch and the disc. She, in turn, holds in her cupped hands, a pot of nectar – *Amritha Kalasam*. Both figures are profusely decorated with jewels of ornate designs. On the right, an attendant is seen playing on a stringed instrument and the top is occupied by Sree Parameswara with His family. Here Siva and Parvathi sit close together and Ganapathy and Murugan stand independently a little distance away. On the left side of the pillar another attendant stands, hands folded. In the top panel, Siva, complete with all His attributes, appears; separate figures of Parvathi Devi and a stocky Bhootam with a shallow vessel of food offering on his head are also noted. He stands between Siva and Parvathi.

*Anantasana Moorthy* or Vishnu seated on Ananta is displayed on the eighth pillar. The serpent holds his hood over his Master's head. The handsome features of Vishnu are noteworthy. In each of the four hands the Vaishnava emblems are sculpted. Hanuman is shown in medium height on the right side and on top Krishna stands playing the flute. A well executed figure of Garuda (on a par



with Hanuman in size) stands on the left side of the pillar and Sree Rama and Lakshmana are seen on top.

*Vishnu* in the typical sitting posture with two hands showing the *Mudras* or symbols of *Varadam* and *Abhayam* as dispenser of boons and as refuge, known as *Varadabhaya Moorthy*, comes next in line. A bearded *Muni* (sage) is seen on the top section above Him, possibly levitating and he watches the Lord with hands folded in reverence. The expression of bliss is evident on this sage's face.

The beautiful figure of *Swayamvara Rugmini* comes thereafter. Her left leg is slightly bent, indicative of movement, and the eyes are modestly downcast. A grand array of ornaments is on display. On the two sides of the pillar are stationed two female attendants, one holding a typical Kerala type vessel in her hand and the other carrying a lighted torch. On the left hand top panel sits Krishna as a small child, butter ball in hand and on the top right Ganesh rides His vehicle, the rat.

An unusually fine sculpture of *Ashtothara Venugopala* is seen on the eleventh pillar. Krishna sits in the *Padmasanam* pose under an elaborately carved tree, playing the flute with two hands while the two other hands, with upturned palms, are placed on the lap in typical meditative pose. Two other hands hold a conch each while the remaining two out of the eight hold a cosmic wheel. A couple of female celestials are seen doing oblation with water from pots on to the Lord's head. On the right side of the pillar, one lady-in-waiting stands ready with another pot of sacred water held aloft in her hands to give to the main celestial performing the oblation. On the upper section Rama stands, bow in hand. An unusual representation of Hanuman is seen attacking a female security guard of Ravana's Lanka. She is identified as Lanka Lakshmi. The left side of the main figure too carries a lady with a pot as on the corresponding side. On the top are seen the eight-armed Siva and two sages in a posture of worship.

*Venugopala*, Krishna playing on a flute is seen as the central figure on the twelfth pillar. On the right side stands a female figure sporting a flower bud in her hand. The Bali-Sugreeva wrestling match is once again repeated on the top portion. The right side has another female figure, musical instrument in hand to balance the one on the opposite side. The top section finds Brahma in the usual sitting posture with two female attendants, palms joined together, standing on either side.

The next pillar has a group of musical pillars similar to pillar two.

An extraordinarily well-executed figure assumes the position of the main figure on the last pillar of this side and is identified as *Amrithabhishekam* Vishnu.



Here the Lord is seen anointing Himself with *Amritham* (nectar) by pouring it on His own head from a round inverted pot. (This theme has been earlier depicted in a small side sculpture in a previous pillar of this hall). The large-sized figure is indeed beautiful. On the right side of the pillar an attendant awaits with another pot to replenish the nectar. A scene from *Sita Kalyanam* showing Rama knotting the bow and Lakshmana and Sita in the background fills the top portion. On the left side is another attendant with folded hands. Two images of Sree Narasimha Swamy, in full fury, are carved on top.

The description of all the fourteen pillars on the left hand side, as one faces the south, is over. A few steps placed in the mid portion of the *Mandapam* on the southern side from floor level give access to it. (Crossing that area, the pillars on the opposite side commence in all glory).

The majestic standing figure of *Veera Rama*, bow and arrow in hand, rises from the fifteenth pillar. The face reflects His grandeur. On the right side of this pillar an eye-catching figure of Hanuman stands, one hand covering the mouth and slightly bent in frame, conveying the depth of abject humility. The top frame shows Yasoda and baby Krishna. Lakshmana, bow and arrow tucked under the left arm and with hands folded, waits near his beloved brother on the left of the pillar. On the top space is seen one of the few *Anantasayanam* stone sculptures located in this Temple.

The next pillar repeats the collection of musical pillars as seen previously.

The seventeenth pillar is unique as representation of realistic art. A portly four-armed Ganesh or *Chathurbahu Ganapathy* sits under an elaborately worked tree. On the right and left sides of the pillar, scenes from the world of the terrestrials, as removed from the celestial realm appear. Introduction of the purely human element as different from the Gods' and demi-Gods is depicted only on this pillar in the entire *Kulasekhara Mandapam*. On the right side of the pillar, figures of two Namboodiri Brahmin priests, correct to the last detail, are presented. They can easily be identified as Namboodiries because of their marks of identification like the tuft of hair knotted to the front and the way the cloth is worn. Aspects like the *Vibhooti* (holy ash) smeared in lines across the forehead and chest are clearly picked out. One priest is in the midst of performing his *Puja* and his right hand holds a flower while the left hand has the bell with a long handle and is lifted as if ready to ring. Another Namboodiri stands nearby and is obviously his assistant (*Parikarmi*) and on his head he balances a shallow vessel (*Urali*) full of a jaggery sweet offering known as *Appam* to be submitted to the Deity. The top panel goes back to the *Puranic* themes and shows young Krishna and His brother Balarama fighting the elephant named Kuvalaya-peedom in the court of the demon king, Kamsa. The left portion of the pillar has one more Namboodiri Brahmin priest, yet another assistant, with



all details correct, standing with a vessel of *Nivedyam* on his head. That vessel is covered with a similar inverted vessel. The top panel has the Goddess Durga on Her vehicle, the lion.

Siva as *Brahmanda Tandava Moorthy*, the Bhootam held firmly betwixt His two legs, comes next. He is shown as standing and not in any cosmic dance pose as is usual, and is presented with sixteen hands. The right portion of the pillar has a *Siva Bhootam*, a member of the Lord's retinue, sitting comfortably on a prostrate demon, playing away on a flat drum like percussion instrument for the dance of his Master. The top space has a figure of Subramonya, son of Siva, on His vehicle, the peacock. The left side displays Nandi, the Bull, gazing at Nataraja in abject adoration. The top section is occupied by a four-armed Vishnu.

*Swayamvara Sree Krishna* stands looking at *Swayamvara Rugmini* on the opposite pillar on the other side of the hall. The right side is ornamental. Its top portion portrays another scene from the *Ramayanam*. Sree Rama proves His expertise in archery by passing a single arrow through seven trees. Lakshmana looks on. The left side of the pillar holds a Goddess, flower bud in hand. Varaha Moorthy and two attendants also appear on top.

*Garuda Maha Vishnu* is presented on the twenty first pillar, which exhibits an impressive collection of major figures. Garuda the bird carries Maha Vishnu and His two divine consorts, Goddesses Lakshmi and Bhoomi. Much detailed work has gone into many of the aspects. On the two sides of the pillar a sage stands with a musical instrument in hand, sunk in meditation. Right side top shows Sree Rama with the ever faithful Hanuman and the top left has a standing Vishnu.

Succeeding it comes the *Sree Rama Pattabhishekam* (coronation of Sree Rama). It represents a grand scale sculpture and is elaborate. While the ceremony may be basically defined as materialistic, in direct contrast is the expression on the face of Sree Rama which is one of detachment. His famous bow lies across His lap. Sree Sita Devi sits to His left. Sages are seen performing the *Abhishekam* with holy water on His head. The right side of the pillar depicts Lakshmana, bow in hand, in an attitude of deep veneration. A different note is struck with the figure of Siva performing the *Oordhva Tandavam*, a very difficult dance step involving raising one leg straight up. This figure is introduced on the top level on this side. Hanuman stands on the left side of the pillar, joy radiating from his face, hands folded in homage as usual. Vishnu sitting on Ananta appears on top.

A theme dear to temple culture is presented on the twenty third pillar, which is *Gajendra-moksham*. A beautiful figure of the four-armed Vishnu is



predominant as the central figure. The Elephant King (the Pandyan ruler Indradymna, after he was cursed), trunk raised in homage, can be seen only if one looks for him, as he is partially hidden behind the Lord, on his left. On the right side an attendant is seen and on top two sets of figures, Markandeyan with the *Siva Lingam* and the Goddess slaying a demon. On the left side of the pillar too an attendant is visible with clasped hands raised above the head in an attitude of devotion. Top space is taken up by a standing Vishnu.

The next pillar is ornamented with one of the most enchanting and famous sculptures – the *Swayamvara Parvathi* with an exquisitely crafted flower garland in Her hands. The interplay of shyness and happiness on the face is fascinating. She is located just opposite the figure of the *Swayamvara Siva* on the other side of the Thousand Pillared Hall. On the right side, a lady-in-waiting stands holding a vessel of food offering to the Deity in her raised hand. Nataraja is visible on the top. On the left side one more lady-in-waiting, torch in hand is seen. The upper space is reserved for the *Govardhana* or the lifting of Mount Govardhana by young Sree Krishna to save the village from deluge. That scene is reproduced here and Krishna is seen holding aloft the mountain with the left hand and playing the flute with the right hand. Animals sheltering underneath it are also presented.

*Maha Vishnu Panchakshari* is represented on pillar twenty five. A sublime expression plays on the Lord's face. Goddess Lakshmi is seated on His left thigh. On the right side of the pillar a male celestial with folded hands, stands. Lakshmana and Hanuman occupy the top section. On the left is a finely sculpted Sage Narada playing on his fabled hand *Veena*. Bala Krishna subduing the serpent Kaliyan by dancing on his head is depicted above.

*Bhadrakali*, the fierce Goddess with four arms and an expression generating awe, rises from the next pillar which carries a lot of detailed work. She is in standing position. The right side is purely decorative and the top shows Rama and Lakshmana with Sugreeva while Hanuman stands to the back. On the left is positioned a female guard of Kali, fully armed with sword and shield. On the top panel Sree Rama and the old woman devotee Sabari are included.

The last of the four groups of musical instruments comes thereafter.

The twenty eighth pillar, which is also the final one, has an imposing figure of *Sree Sankaranarayanan* sculpted on it. The right portion of this impressive figure is devoted to Siva, trident in hand, while the left is reserved for Vishnu holding the conch and mace. The right and left sides of this pillar are flanked by two lady celestials with a flower bud each. On the top panel is Vishnu performing His own *Abhishekam* and the top left is devoted to Krishna's *leelas*. Krishna is also presented separately, eating butter.



Thus this marvel of magnificence in stone nestles like a fabulous jewel in the bosom of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The artisans have striven to fill up all available spaces contributing at times to seeming lack of connection. The inclusion of birds and little animals enhances the natural element of the backdrop.

The description of the *Ayiramkal Mandapam* or *Kulasekhara Mandapam* having been concluded, the area of the *Belikkal* comes up next in order. So the pilgrimage continues.

## The Hall of Sculptures

A grand hall of sculptures of lofty proportions, professing considerable height and divided into two religiously significant sections, links the eastern *Sivelippura* to the main entrance which faces east, leading to the *Nalambalam* or outer periphery of the inner regions. It is the area with *Dhwaja Sthambham* or flag mast and that containing the *Valia Belikkal* or main sacrificial stone. The sacrificial stone should not be mistaken for one used for human or animal sacrifices which have never occurred here. *Beli* or sacrifice is the food offered to the various attendants of the presiding Deity. The flagmast and the *Belikkal* are situated in the centre of their respective areas. Though the section apportioned to the flag mast comes first from the eastern *Sivelippura*, in actual construction, it appears as an extension to the portion defined as the area for the said *Beli* stone, which is situated second from the aforesaid corridor. Apart from that, for the sake of convenience and continuity it is better to start from one side of the area housing the *Belikkal*, cover the entire hall in two parts which includes the flag mast area and sign off at the other side of the former area. In *Padhathi* Temples, among which the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple stands in prominence, the *Belikkalppura* in its prescribed form is not present. This double hall also offers many important works of superior art, some of them having special sanctity attached to them.

Both these sections abound in pillars, it is seen repeatedly that pillars and to a lesser extent, ceilings form the canvas for the splendid display of artistic excellence at its zenith, in this Temple. The pillars offer endless fascination and are in three defined sections, the top, the middle and the bottom parts. The top and lower areas display the auxillary figures while the mid region is reserved for the main figure of imposing proportions, which in some cases is a theme figure also with the figures of the other two areas becoming part of that theme. In many pillars this pattern of presentation is repeated on all the four sides. As observed earlier, very often these pillars are not really supports even if they appear thus but a forum for master craftsmanship which fills not only the pillars but the cornices too in an amazing overflow of talent. The shafts of these pillars are attributed by some to the later Chola period. By and large the sculptures follow the patterns laid down in the *Silparetnam*, *Syanandoora Purana*



*Samuchayam* and *Eesana Gurudeva Padhathi* which are authoritative works though certain deviations do appear to embrace local characteristics.

In the centre of this hall is consecrated the main *Belikkal* in granite about  $8\frac{1}{2}$  feet high and of considerable girth. It is now covered with gold and faces the eastern entrance just ahead of it leading to the inner regions of the Temple. Two small *Beli* stones can be seen on two sides of this main stone, to its south and west. The southern one is really not a *Belikkal* and is used as a step by the Tantri to reach the top of the main stone during rituals, while the western one is a sacrificial stone in itself. Right on top of this main stone, carved on the high ceiling, is a granite lotus with a granite chain suspended from it. Perhaps a bell was attached to it at some time in the distant past.

The great wooden double doors, which open directly to the *Edanazhi* which forms the middle passage to the interior areas known as the *Nalambalam* or *Chuttambalam* of the Temple leading up to the main shrine, come to the western side of the *Belikkal*. There are three doorways in the inner enclosure in three different directions and by virtue of its placement, this doorway is the most important one as the sanctum sanctorum can be directly viewed from here though one has to traverse a little distance to actually reach it. These two doors in their decorative frame are executed in late Vijayanagaram style sporting the typical lotus pattern with twenty eight carved lotuses and brass trappings. On top of the doorway, as is popular in Kerala architecture, there is a representation of Gaja Lakshmi or Goddess Lakshmi flanked by two elephants. Some figures playing musical instruments are also seen. The horizontal drum known as *Maddalam* played by a female figure has a distinct eighteenth century flavour as this type of instrument is believed to have come to Kerala only then. This drum is generally associated with the Vaishnava *Bhakti* cults of Orissa and Assam. Two very big *Devadasies* (temple maidens), lamp in hand and cast in bronze, stand on either side of this vast entrance on two raised square blocks.

In rotation, on the right side of the door, towers a big single male figure. There is difference of opinion about his identity. Some say he is Daksha accompanied by a retinue of attendants playing on various musical instruments while others claim he is King Harischandra of *Puranic* fame with the devils of the graveyard prancing in glee. On top are seen figures of Sree Rama, Lakshmana and Sita Devi. The back side of this group shows a man caught in the pangs of passion gazing with obvious desire at a voluptuous, young woman standing nearby.

The second pillar, on the right has small figures of the dancing Siva with air-borne sages on clouds, a devotee in a posture of prayer and three Hanuman figures in relief.



The third pillar, is prominent and sports an unusual figure of a warrior with crown, beard and weapons but having breasts like a woman. This may be because of some curse. There is doubt if he could be Brihannala (Arjuna cursed to be a woman for a year) during the time of transformation from man to woman. On the other side of the pillar is a big-sized *Bhikshatana Siva* or Siva begging for alms being given the same by some ladies.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth pillar, deserves very special mention. On it is executed a beautiful figure of Reti Devi riding her vehicle the *Hamsam* (swan), facing the figure of her husband Kama Deva, the god of Love, on the opposite pillar. Both Reti and the swan show great depth of details and are very finely finished. There is an interesting explanation connecting the regal swan. It is seen looking away from Kama Deva, to one side as though in disgust because it chanced upon his dalliance with another woman. On the top is a small panel with Siva and Parvathi on it. The perfectly sculptured towering *Siva Tandavam* on the opposite side is remarkable. Siva's eyes are wide open and full of force but the eye balls are missing. The excellence of the work is such that absence is not felt. Moreover the impression is created in the mind of the viewer that the eyes are boring into him. This dancing pose is one of the hundred and eight postures in the rhythmic dance of this Lord known as *Tandavas* and is the *Oordhva Tandavam* where one leg of Nataraja is lifted straight up. Near Him is seen Brahma, the Creator, playing on the cymbals with which He measures time for the dance of Siva, who supersedes time itself. In the lower section, the bull Nandikesan, the Lord's favoured attendant, sits below Nataraja playing the special type of drum known as *Mizhavu* as accompaniment to his Master's cosmic dance. A fairly big statue of Kali comes on the next side. Near it is seen Maha Vishnu astride Garuda, the bird connecting the story of *Gajendra-moksham* oft repeated to highlight the value of devotion and the timely grace showered by God on His devotees. This entire narration is depicted on the upper portion of the said pillar in full detail. Near it Sree Rama and Lakshmana being carried by Hanuman are also picturised. This pillar is rated as an example of superior quality work.

The fifth pillar, is the most important one in this collection on many counts and stands a little inside the *Belikkal* area. This is identified as the first pillar of this hall. The extension of the flag mast area lies beyond it. On this pillar rises a mighty, beautifully sculpted figure of Sree Hanuman Swamy with folded hands and measuring twelve feet in height, facing west. He is worshipped as a pious, benign but powerful Deity infused with sanctity and potency and not as an ornamental pillar. Worship and offerings are daily done for Him, and He is quite a favourite divinity among the devotees. One miracle which is an existing truth and which can easily be verified is that the butter with which this figure is covered by way of offering, never melts even when exposed to intense heat and

3. *There is a temple in Tamil Nadu dedicated to this concept.*



continues to be firm. (Refer chapter *Miracles*) The butter also remains unpolluted even if it is kept for some days.

To complete the description of the region under survey, the next pillar should be the *Ashtanaga Garuda*, which stands a little to the inside of the left side of this hall symmetrizing the Sree Hanuman Swamy on the right inside. The central passage way to this hall is between these two figures and on the ceiling above this passage is carved a *Meru Chakram* complete with the *Bindu*, with the figure of Goddess Lakshmi seated in a lotus on either side of it.

Since the two halls are being taken together, instead of proceeding to the Garuda and to left side pillars, the pillars on the right side of the adjacent flag staff hall are being now completed. The narration will then cross over to the left side of this second area, move eastwards to the big *Belikkal* which starts with the Garuda on the left side and go on to end at the left side of the big double doors.

Right behind the Hanuman, with a small space in between, stands the fierce, big figure of one of the two guards of the Temple, the *Dwarapalakan* by name Vijayan in a half enclosure of wooden rails. His ornaments and other details are picked out in precision. (Refer chapter *Miracles*). He faces the east.

Near to this figure, on its left side, comes the sixth pillar, a huge lion-faced mythical *Vyali* exhibiting its valour by subjugating an elephant. There was a round stone ball in the mouth of the beast, which attracted the attention of the people. It was believed that if the ball was rolled in the *Vyali*'s mouth, the person doing it would get relief from ailments and would also ensure a trauma-free end. As such daily it would be rolled by countless hands and this most unfortunately led to the breaking of the ball into many bits. There is an identical *Vyali* on the other side with a ball in the mouth. Both these were considered architectural wonders as these balls were sculpted from inside the mouth itself and not separately made and placed within. As such they could not be taken out of the mouth.

Another of the many fine examples of sculpture is the seventh pillar with another statue of the *Bhikshatana Siva* with a musical instrument *Uduku* shaped like a small drum, held in His hands. His attendants, who are also depicted, wear an expression of dejection on their faces because of their Master's sad plight. On three sides of the base, dancing figures are seen displaying details of the attire of dance. Naked women are also carved on the pillars, maybe an extension of one side of the base column which depicts the scene from *Gopastree Vasthrakshepam* from the frolics and pranks of the divine child Krishna. On the right side of this pillar appears a beautiful full-scale figure of a nude lady, ladle in hand, possibly Anasooya getting ready to serve food to the Trinity



after changing them to the status of infants with her spiritual power. Another lady in the nude appears on the other side of the pillar. The top section has the *Vyali*, which is commonly repeated, and three apparently levitating *Munies* (sages) symbolic of the three *Gunas* or characteristics of *Satvam*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The diamond-shaped flower, which was a royal insignia of bygone days, is carved on it.

The eighth and ninth pillars, are of much reduced girth and mainly ornamental.

Pillar number ten, forms the base for the magnificent *Siva Tandavam*, the cosmic dance of Siva in typical posture with one leg raised across the other leg and the hand held in position. Special attention is drawn to the face which projects an expression of *Nirvedam* (calm introspection or emotionless non-involvement). This is considered by many as one among the outstanding sculptures. On the side, Brahma is repeated in two figures, one of which could be interpreted as *Adi Brahma* playing on the cymbals of time. There is some miscalculation in the apportioning of space in the big figure as on two sides of the figure, the faces have become somewhat disproportionate and non-symmetrical in the comparative system.

On the base is Nandikeswara, the Bull, the favourite vehicle and attendant of Siva, playing a percussion instrument known as *Mizhavu*, which is a copper pot covered with thin leather at the mouth. Maha Vishnu is present on the left side playing the *Udukku*, another small hand drum-like instrument, while Maha Lakshmi, His consort, flower in hand as usual, looks on. On the western side top column are picturised some sages in an attitude of deep devotion possibly induced by this great dance. The eastern side has Sree Ganesh and some saints and the front, the *Vyali*. Once again the Tamil influence manifests in the Bhootam under the God's feet who sports a mostache in Tamil style.

With this pillar the eastern *Sivelippura* is reached and it is necessary to cross over to the left side passing the *Dhwaja Sthambham* to continue the description with the first east pillar of the double hall on the left. Before the elaboration on that pillar starts, details about the *Dhwaja Sthambham* area are recorded.

The *Dhwaja Sthambham* stands eighty feet high in a specially sanctified area in the middle of the second hall enclosed by a square barricade of flat planks in wood like railings. The top portion of the hall above the flag mast is left open to enable the mast to stand exposed to nature. As such it can be seen from a distance from some directions. The other areas remain covered. The mast is made of flawless teak wood as per temple norms and was brought from *Kakkathimala*, a place about thirty miles away from Thiruvananthapuram,



without once being lowered to the ground, which is mandatory according to the religious rules. This was a colossal feat in those days. It is simple, almost spartan, in style when compared to those in some other temples. First enclosed by copper plate rings (*paras*), it was later gilded thickly with fine gold in a fashion unique to Travancore Temple artisans. A standing figure of Garuda in small dimensions holds a place of honour on top of the flag mast.

On pillar number eleven, which borders the eastern *Sivelippura*, stands an excellently executed figure of Bhadra Kali. One striking feature is that though She should have the appearance of terror with Her fangs, which are prominent, the face is somehow sublimely peaceful. A thought crosses the mind whether the face was intentionally fashioned thus by a master hand to illustrate the concept that under the influence of Sree Padmanabha Swamy who is *Shantaswaroopam* or embodiment of tranquility, even the fierce and fearsome become benign. The base of this figure shows the kneeling *Vethalam* on whom Kali stands. Though one portion of an arm is broken, Kali presents a magnificent figure. Eastern and southern sides depict Kali's attendants in a mood of jubilation playing on various musical instruments. The scene of Sree Rama breaking the bow before winning Sita (taken from the *Ramayanam*) is also featured. A fairly big figure of Veerabhadran, closely associated with Bhadra Kali, is sculpted on the western side of this pillar. On the top section Vishnu is flanked by Lakshmi Devi and Bhoomi Devi (prosperity and earth).

Pillars twelve and thirteen are slender and decorative ones having a slim lady with a flower and the next, a lady with a lamp, both similar in medium size.

The main figure on pillar, fourteen is that of the Lord as Venugopala or Krishna (Gopala) playing the flute. On the base, the whole of *Gokulam* is shown as taking shelter under the Govardhana Mountain (which is held up by Krishna), during the torrential rains. The panel is significant in theme. There is no place for hostility under God's grace and all live in peaceful co-existence. This is significant in today's world of strife. The carving of a rat sitting on a snake's head in comradeship brings home this point. On the eastern side there is the figure of a goddess. The bottom panel has a beautifully worked herd of cattle with ferocious beasts of prey close by. On the top section three sages sit in a prayerful attitude. The same theme is extended to the other sides also.

Pillar fifteen, balances a similar *Simha Vyali* or the mythical beast seen on pillar six.

Pillar sixteen stands a little to the inside, and right at the back of the Garuda and faces east. It is the figure of the *Dwarapalakan* Jayan and is identical with the figure of Vijayan on the other side and is also seen in a half enclosure of wooden railings.



With pillar seventeen the *Belikkal* area by itself re-commences. Right behind the *Dwarapalakan* Jayan, is a small space and behind it in another half enclosure of wooden rails rises the imposing figure of the *Ashtanaga* Garuda, symmetrizing the mighty Hanuman on the other side. Garuda, the favoured vehicle of Vishnu, stands with folded hands but even in this posture of humility, his power percolates through. As the name itself reveals, he carries eight mighty serpents on his person – the *Ashtanagas*.<sup>4</sup> To cool his inner heat, once a month this Garuda is completely oiled.

The eighteenth pillar, bears the impressive figure of Kama Deva, the god of Love, with well built muscles, moustache and sugar-cane stick in hand, in Nayik style. He is seen standing in a chariot which has slender pillars supporting a roof. On the other three sides are individual figures of ladies carrying lamps or in the act of fanning and are perhaps his attendants waiting upon their master.

The nineteenth pillar, is not a major one and has no noteworthy reliefs to be specially mentioned. There is one figure which could be an *Alvar* (one of the twelve famed Vaishnavite Alvar saints) perhaps the 'Kulasekhara Perumal' who ruled this land and later on renounced all material attractions to become a sage and is famous as *Kulasekhara Alvar*. This figure could also represent Nammalvar, the most revered of them all. Both of them had connections with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in one way or the other.

The twentieth pillar has its own collection of figures but mentionable among them is that of a lady adorning her forehead with a dot, looking at a mirror she holds in her hand. On the opposite side is a small but unusual figure of a pregnant woman with hand on the head. A *Siva Bhakta* or devotee of Siva wearing the *Rudraksham* (a holy object) and with matted hair appears below in separate relief. He could possibly be a Nayanar as one King from this land perhaps Cheraman Perumal Nayanar finds a place among the long line of sixty three Saivite saints called Nayanars (whose lives form the theme of *Periyapuranam*).

The last pillar, which numbers as the twenty first and is erected on the left side of the double door entrance as one faces it, is also elaborate in character. The most prominent work is that of Veerabhadran with the skull garland, facing north and finished with expertise. His expression is grim and calculated to inspire awe. It is held by some that once upon a time Siva in unorthodox worship was projected as fierce and somewhat cruel. With the advent of Brahmin influence a separate identity was bestowed on Him and He became designated to the position of a Siva Bhootam (attendant of Lord Siva). In many temples he is given the status of the protector, as the chief of the Temple guards and

4. *Ashtanagas* – Anantan, Vasuki, Thakshakan, Karkkodakan, Padman, Mahaprabhan, Shankhan, and Gulikan.



especially Saivite in nature. On the right side of this figure stands a big drummer in a mood of exaltation, which is well reflected in his face and stance. Below him comes a panel depicting a scene from *Daksha Yagam* and the top section has a procession of Siva and Parvathi, who are riding Nandi. The back pillar facing southwards has an abundance of work of varying dimensions. Ganapathy features on top, *Kaliya Mardanam* of Bala Krishna, Sree Subramonya astride His vehicle, the peacock, as well as Kama Deva and Reti are all reproduced. The left side of this pillar has the big figure of a lady playing on a musical instrument termed *Chengala*, which is a metal disc suspended from a short chain and beaten with a thick stick. Some of sculptures are so life-like and natural that they invite continuous admiration. Curving hair, well-pleated apparel, gorgeous ornaments, moods of mind and body are all captured and projected in stone which obeys the master's touch.

Thus the description of the partitioned hall of a rich variety of handsomely crafted pillars is concluded. It is significant to note that in this wholly Vaishnavite Temple, there has been no reluctance to introduce Siva or other divinities due to the total absence of cult clashes.

Between the inner areas and the *Sivelippura* many open spaces and courtyards are seen, which are partly paved with granite slabs, the remaining portions being spread with white sand, which are typical features of the Kerala style of temple construction.

From the *Belikkal* area, two granite steps, polished smooth, reach up to the double door which opens on to the next inner enclosure which is termed *Nalambalam* or *Chuttambalam*. One steps into a broad passageway known as *Edanazhi* which is flanked by two raised and very large platforms lofty in height known as *Vathil Madoms*, on which Brahmins sit and daily chant the three *Vedas* and other holy texts (Refer chapter *Worship of the Celestial*). In the midportion of this central corridor on the ceiling is a granite carving of a fairly big Garuda on kneeling posture facing Sree Padmanabha Swamy with two lotuses placed horizontal to the Garuda. It is here on these *Mandapams* some of the *Vahanas* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy are placed and decorated during the festivals. Some pits are also visible which are the *Homa Kundas* used for performing *Vedic* and ritualistic oblations on specified occasions. Each platform has five pillars and, while the work of three pillars on each side is nothing very outstanding, the two main pillars erected on either end of the middle corridor offer two more significant figures which are rated among the many grand sculptures seen in this Temple. On the left side towers Bheeshma complete with beard, the grand sire of the Pandavas and Kauravas, in his well executed chariot. Even the spokes of the wheels are worked in fine detail. On his left, facing south are seen Siva and Parvathi with their attendants. On the left side top area is executed a fairly compact *Anantashayanam*. This

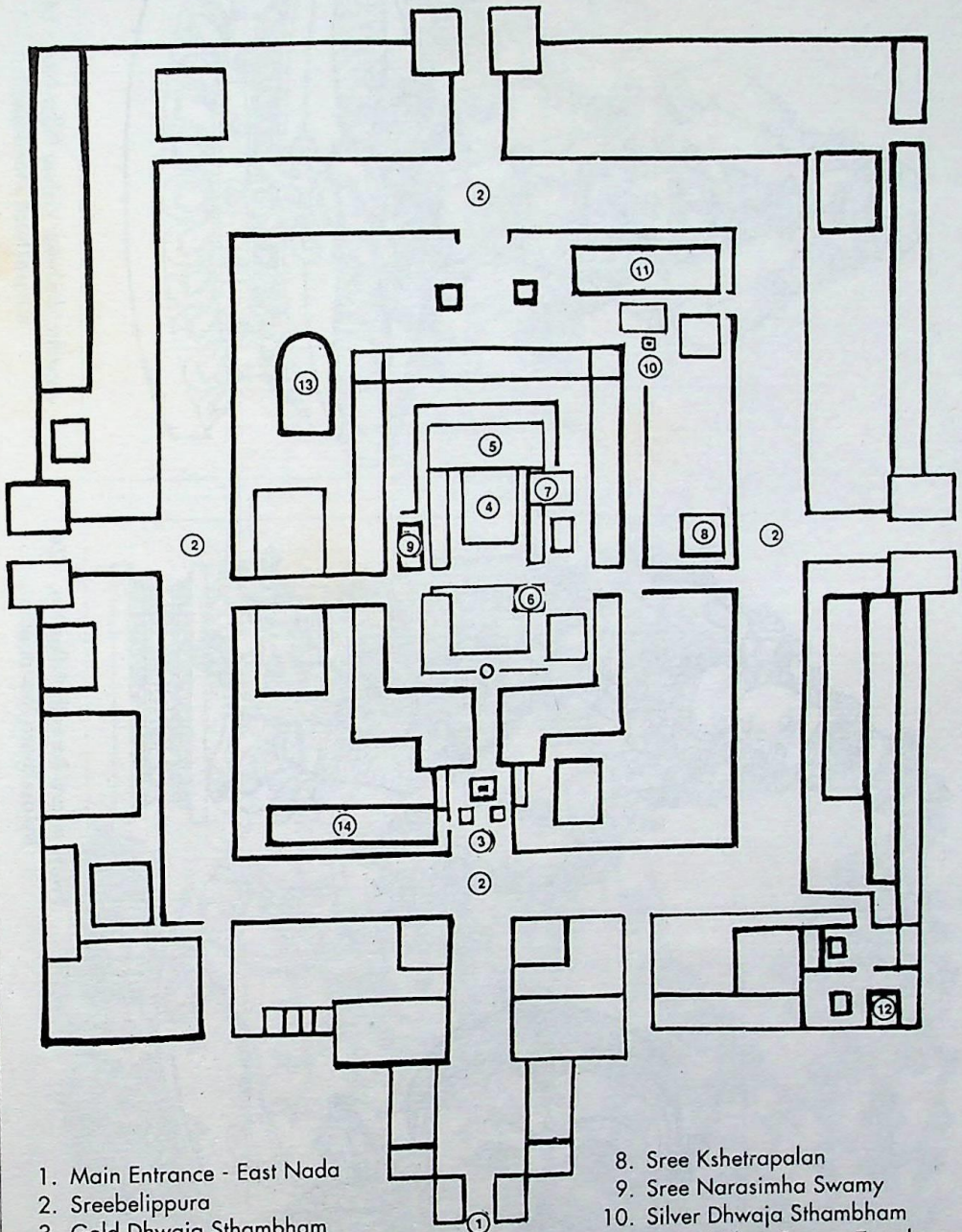


invites special mention as in this Temple of the *Anantashayee*, other than the main Idol itself, few are the sculptural representations of this concept. On the right side, i.e. on the northern side, are arrayed the Pandava brothers in modest size. Behind the pillar is a much smaller decorated one without figures. The second pillar has Vishnu playing the *Veena*, a dancer adorning herself, Hanuman (carrying the mountain) and Garuda. Sree Rama, Ganapathy, Venugopala and Skanda array themselves on the next pillar. The fourth pillar carries Siva on Nandi, Siva playing the *Veena*, Venugopala, Veera Rama, Rama-Sugreeva pact and Subramonya on the peacock. The last pillar is of note. Two ladies preforming the *Kolattom* dance is seen. (Representations of folk dances are not too many in the Temple).

On the right hand elevated platform stands the majestic figure of a warrior, bow in hand, in a chariot complete with circular carved granite wheels. His identity is in dispute with the majority claiming him to be Karna, the eldest of the sons of Kunthi Devi, mother of the Pandavas while others hold that he is Arjuna, the famed warrior and third among the five Pandavas. At the same time certain aspects give rise to doubts about both these identities. The figure has a snake just below the right hand. This is partially explained by stating that Karna holds the *Nagastram*, the weapon which receives the blessings of the serpent, in his hand. His bow is said to produce the sound of the Eight Serpents. Above the crown-like head gear there is a garland of Calotropis, which is normally associated with Sree Parameswara. On one side of the base the Pandava brothers appear and also the wrestling bout between the monkey chiefs, Bali and Sugreeva, in much smaller proportions. On the southern side of the pillar is shown a fairly big figure of a man playing on a long piped instrument. *Deepalakshmi* figures which the Temple favours to the maximum are introduced here also. At the very end of this raised platform on the northern wall is seen a door which opens out into a room in which the different *Vahanas* (vehicles) used by the Deities for the processions are kept. The fourth pillar coming up on this side has an uncommon engraving of ladies performing, the local dance of the land which is known as *Thiruvathirakkali*. With this pillar and the fifth pillar of the opposite side, the local dance forms are recognised (though *Kolattom* was imported from Gujarat along with the Gujarathi influx). *Thiruvathirakkali* continues to retain its popularity.

Right in front of the *Edanazhi* and just before the *Abhisravana Mandapam* is a square platform in granite at ground level, with four pillars at the four corners. They are elegantly worked and each has its own *Deepalakshmi* in bold relief almost as a separate figure attached to the base pillar. Near the pillars on the four sides inside the square are placed four bronze *Deepalakshmi* statues of over medium proportions with two big five-tiered bronze lamps near them. Right in the middle of the square which comes in line with the central door of



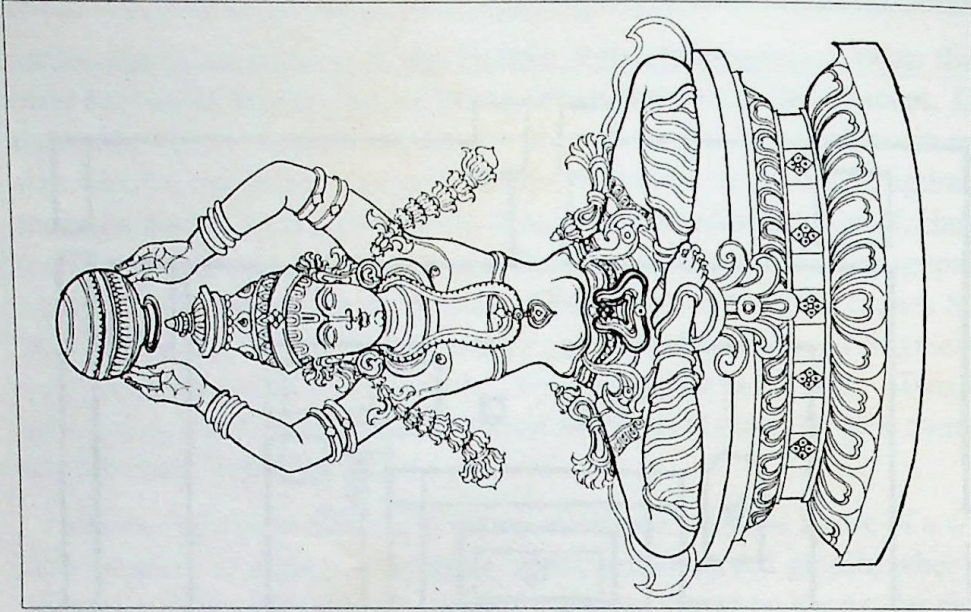


1. Main Entrance - East Nada
2. Sreebelippura
3. Gold Dhawaja Sthambham
4. Ottakkal Mandapam
5. Sreekovil Sree Padmanabha Swamy
6. Sree Ramaswamy
7. Sree Vishvakshenan

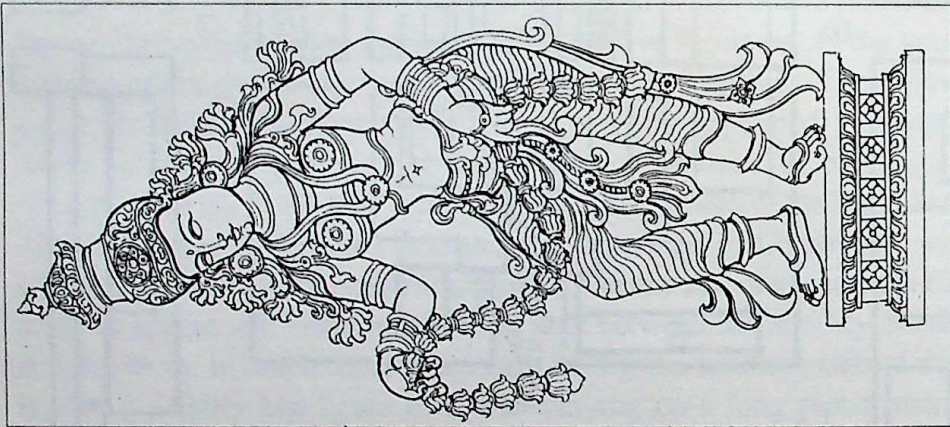
8. Sree Kshetrapalan
9. Sree Narasimha Swamy
10. Silver Dhawaja Sthambham
11. Sree Krishna Swamy Temple
12. Agrashala Ganapathy Temple
13. Sree Sastha Temple
14. Kulasekhara Mandapam

Layout of the Temple

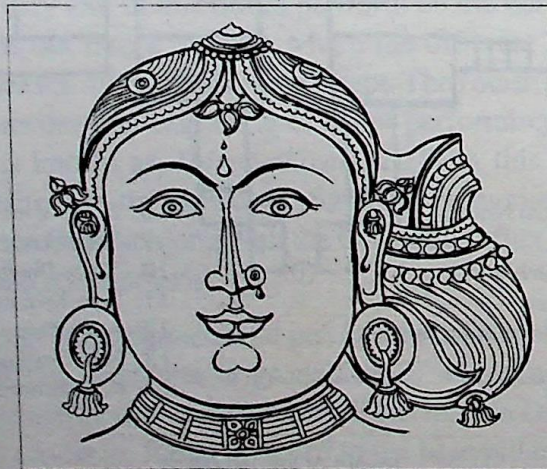




Amrithabhisheka Vishnu Pillar No. : 14  
Kulasekhara Mandapam



Swayamvara Parvathi Pillar No. : 24  
Kulasekhara Mandapam



Close up of Deepalakshmi - Kulasekhara Mandapam



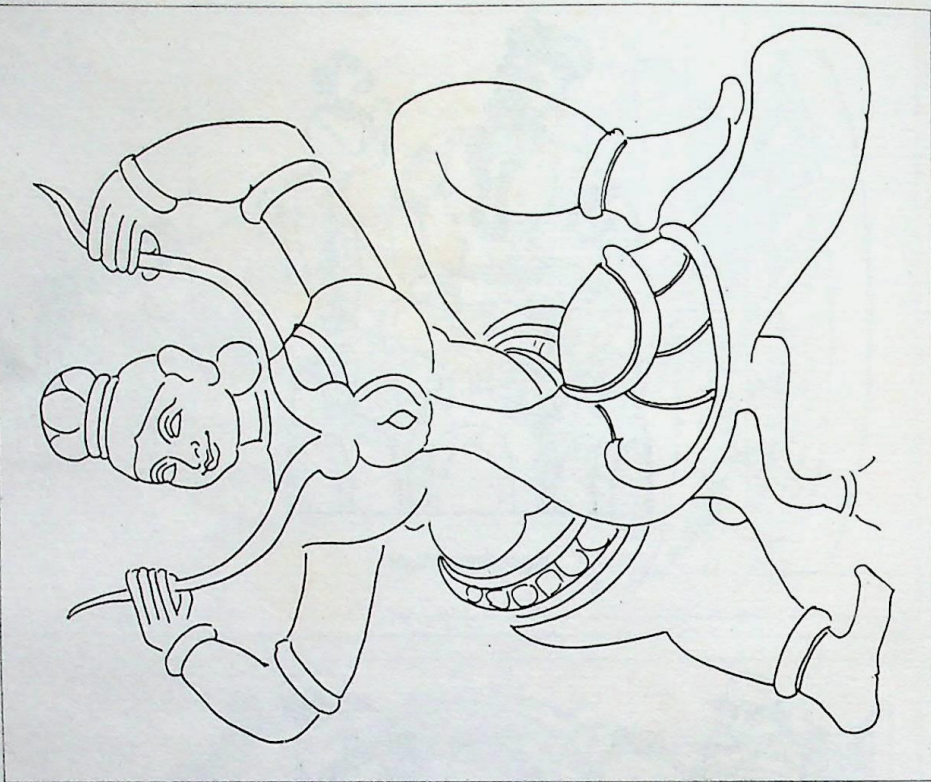


Agasthya Muni

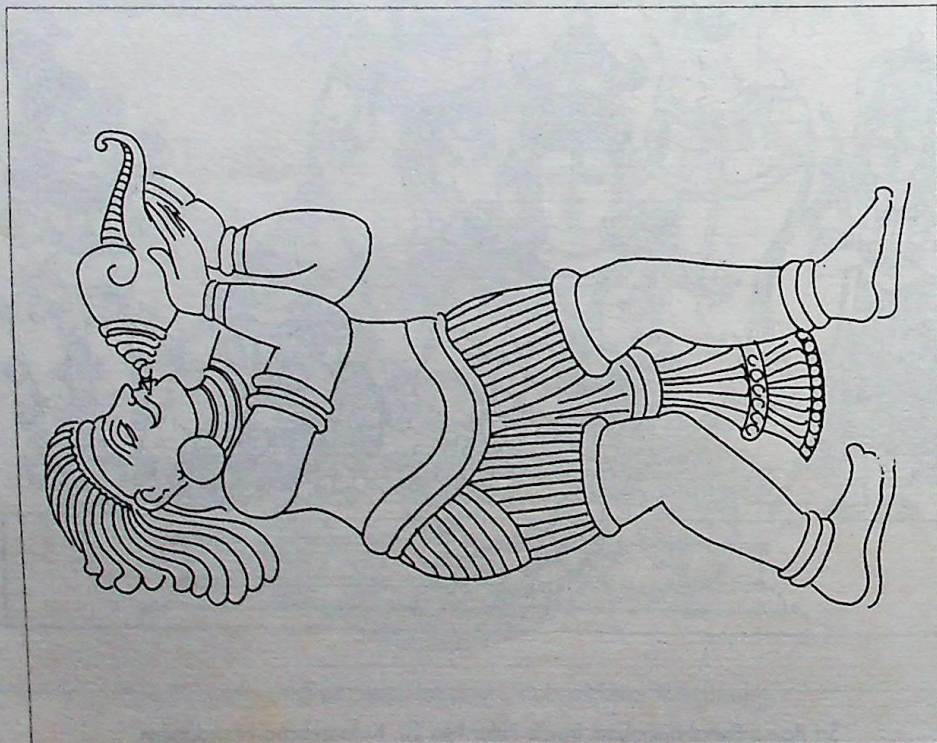


Sri Rama Pattabhishekam Inside Pillar No.20, Kulasekhara Mandapam



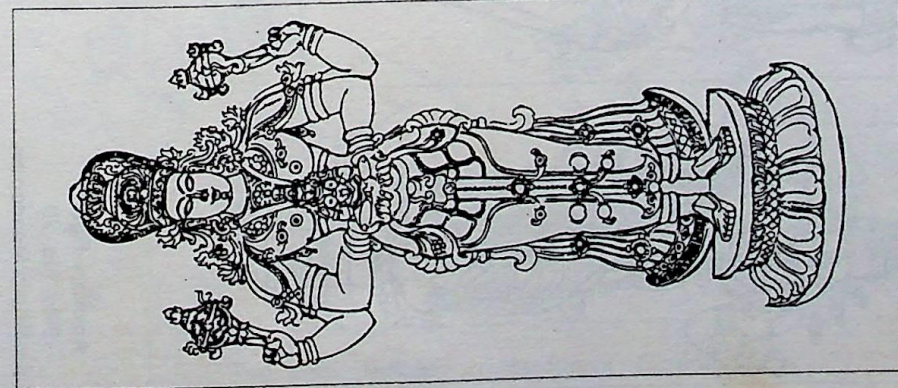


Bakasuravadham - Sreekrishna, Seevelipura - South east Mandapam

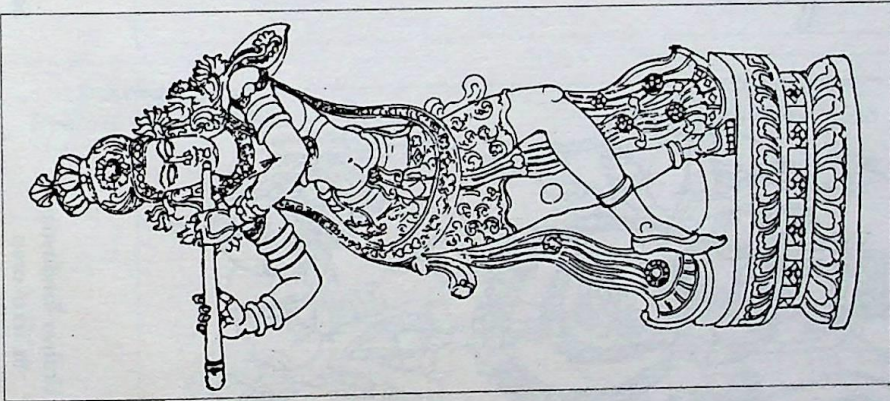


Siva Bhootam, Seevelipura Pillar - North Nada - Left Side

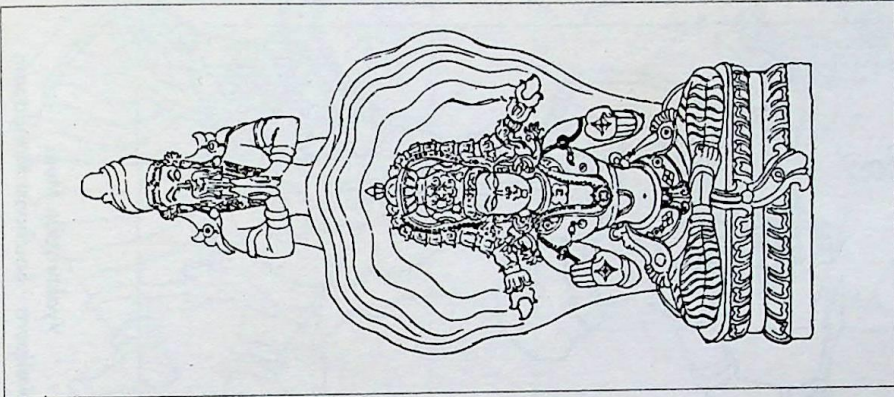




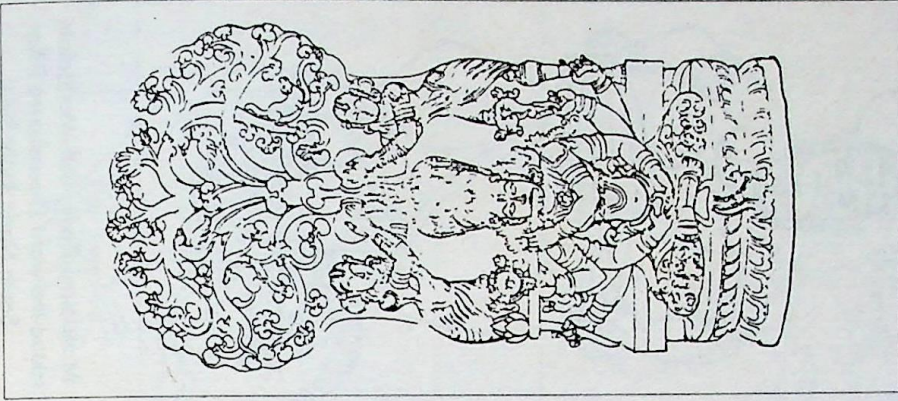
Maha Lakshmi Gopalam  
Kulasekhara Mandapam  
Leftside of the Mandapam 7th Pillar (Main)



Sree Krishnan  
Kulasekhara Mandapam  
Leftside of the Mandapam 12th Pillar

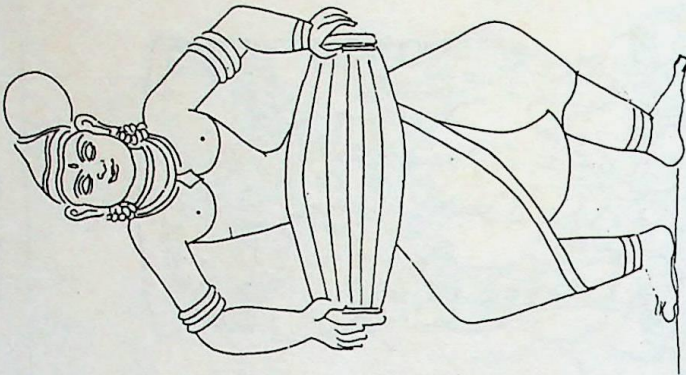


Vishnu  
Kulasekhara Mandapam  
Leftside of the Mandapam 9th Pillar



Ashtothara Venugopalam  
Kulasekhara Mandapam  
Leftside of the Main Pillar No. 11

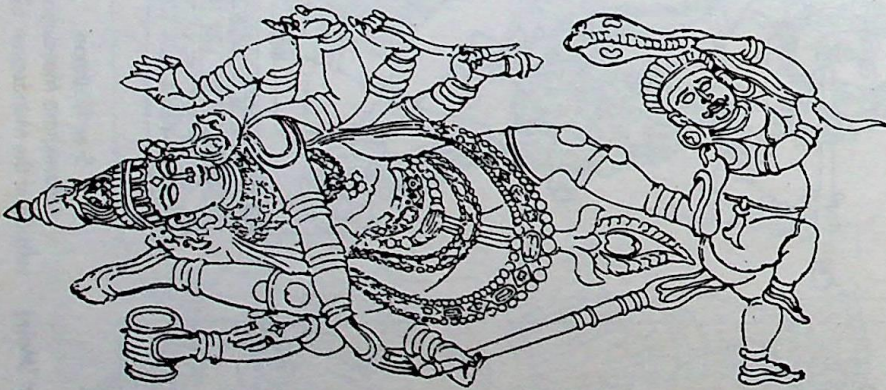




Maddalam Player with Maddalam  
round the waist (Seevelipura Pillar-  
South Nada Right Side)



Vyakhrapda Muni  
Seevelipura - Southeast Mandapam



Urdhva Tandavam  
Belikkal area



Auxillary Figure  
Pillar No. 20  
Kulasekhara Mandapam

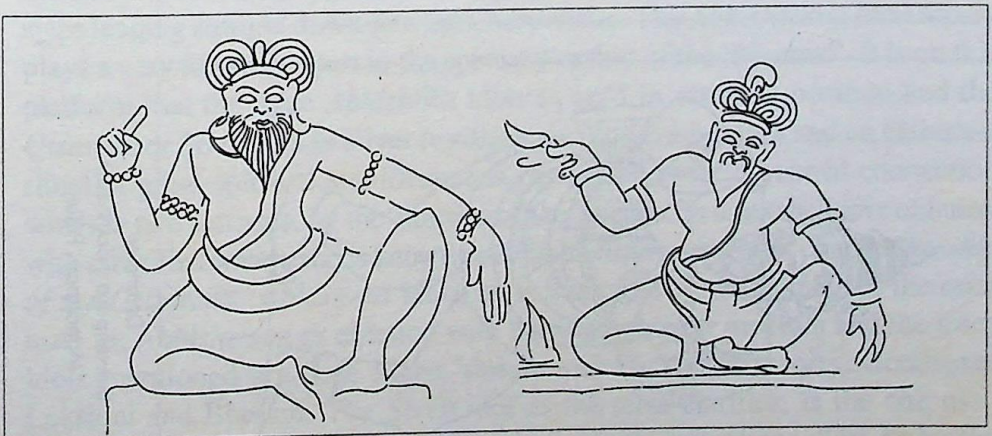




Dancing Figure,  
Sreekovil - Westside Pillar

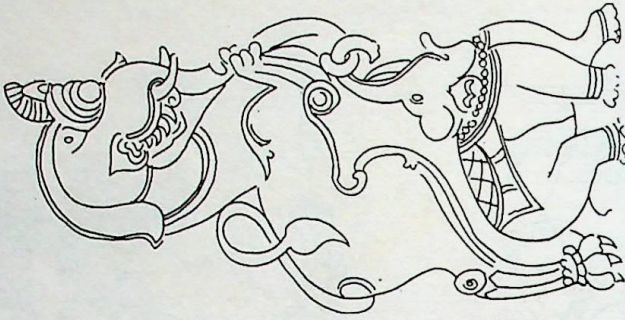


Door Keeper,  
Seevelipura - West Nada - Leftside

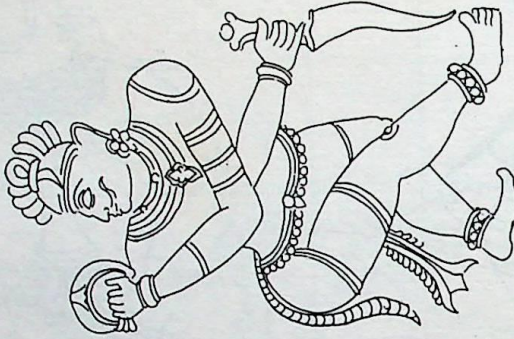


Two Sages - Kulasekhara Mandapam - Northwest

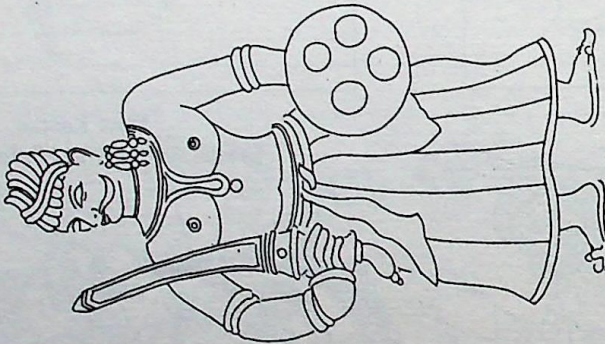




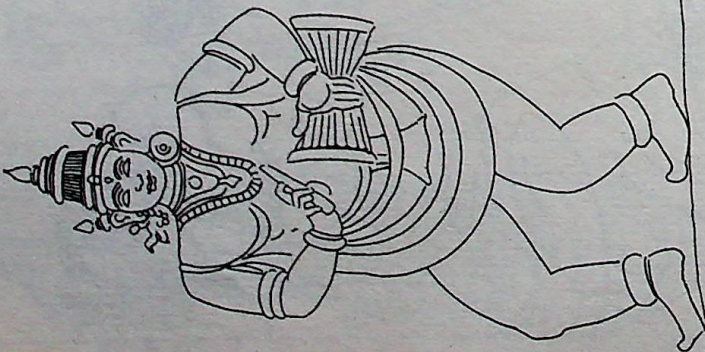
Simha Vyali and Gaja  
Seevelipura - North Nada  
(Near Dhvaja Stambha)



Warrior  
Seevelipura - East Nada



Relief of a Dalava  
Seevelipura - Northside



Drummer  
Seevelipura - Southeast  
Mandapam Pillar



the main inner shrine is a bronze twelve-tiered lamp with these tiers giving the appearance of leaves on branches of what resembles a fig tree, known as *Kavara Vilakku* (huge lamp with branches) standing on a tortoise. Small figures of sages and animals are seen at the base. This lamp is claimed to be one of the finest examples of its kind seen in Kerala temples. Many unique kinds of lamps in various beautiful styles are seen perhaps only here, in this Temple. These types of lamps as well as the *Deepa Sthambhas* are typical in the Kerala temples.

Adjacent to this area comes the *Abhisravana Mandapam* possessing its own special sanctity. Three steps lead sideways to it from the front along with a rectangular step each on either side of the *Mandapam*. Among the many brass hanging lamps seen here, two merit special mention. They each sport the figure of a man with folded hands in *Nayik* style and are very attractive. On this elevated platform twelve pillars are erected. Five of them are exceptional, exhibiting excellently sculpted big figures of the five Pandava brothers. These figures seem to possess a reddish tint unlike the others which are all of black granite. Their rounded bodies enhance the human touch and they stand with folded hands and eyes closed tightly in deep devotion. The ceiling is generously carved and is in wood. The roof of this *Mandapam* is of copper tiles and on two levels. Three *Thazhikakkutams* are placed on top of the roof. While three sides are open, the western side is fully partitioned off in seasoned teak wood which is like a fretwork screen fixed as a wall. Through its many openings can be seen the sanctum, its front platform as well as the *Cheruchuttu* or immediate area of the second enclosure which contains (the first enclosure or) the actual Shrine. Even when standing in the middle corridor, it is possible to get a glimpse of the lighted lamps inside through these delicately fashioned apertures and that is in itself a sight which elevates the emotions with joy. A small but heavy double door in wood with carving and bound with brass is situated right in the middle of this wooden partition. It opens directly on to a small landing and steps leading straight down into the *Cheruchuttu*. The *Abhisravana Mandapam* plays a very important part in the special worship of the 'Perumal'. It is on this platform that the three *Abhisheka* idols in gold in standing position and the *Utsavam* or *Siveli* idol in silver in sitting position are brought and an elaborate ritual of great spiritual significance is performed twice a year in connection with the two festivals, by the Tantries of the Temple. In a nutshell it is oblation with sanctified waters and is known as *Brahma Kalasam*. (Refer chapter *Worship of the Celestial*). *Abhisheka* idols, as is indicated by the name, are the ones used for *Abhishekam* or oblation with liquid or powder medium and the three idols mentioned are Sree Maha Vishnu and His two consorts, Goddesses Lakshmi and Bhoomi. The *Siveli* idol as the term clarifies, is the one used when the Deity is taken out on the ceremonious processions. The *Kalasam*, worship by the consecrated water contained in gold pots, is also conducted



here along with other rites, by the Tantries. They do their prayers on this *Mandapam*.

Retracing the steps a little, from the terminal point of the *Edanazhi*, there runs a corridor of handsome proportions in two divisions, the outer area being covered overhead and the inner area which is not an uninterrupted corridor but more like an open courtyard. There are two male figures engraved in relief on the granite floor to the south and north of this area, in prostrate posture conveying deep devotion to the Deity, Sree Rama. This conclusion is revealed by the letters inscribed in semi-circle above their shoulders. The script is Malayayimma with the first letters reading as 'Rama' and the last ones as *Sada Sevai* translating as 'in everlasting service'. The letters coming in between are difficult to decipher since, to an extent, they are worn out. These figures could also be *Prayaschitha Roopas* depicting repentance, commonly seen in temples elsewhere but most uncommon here. All along the walls in many areas are seen the familiar *Deepalaskhmi* figures and on the ceiling at a few places a big fish is seen, which has been identified as the *Makara Matsyam*, a symbol of royalty. The popular version, however, compares the ceiling to the Ocean of Milk on which Sree Padmanabha Swamy rests on Ananta, who floats on it. The fish then becomes a natural presence. On the pillars bearing the ladies with lamps, the top portion in many areas sports another style of *Vyali* decoration where a set of three small *Vyalies* stand together in a group.

To reach the sanctum sanctorum, the turning to the left is adopted which passes the mighty figure of Bheeshma and proceeds southwards first and at the corner takes the turn to the west. This western corridor passes the smaller kitchen on the left which is in daily use for preparing the *Nivedyas* for various Deities and the *Abhisravana Mandapam* on the right. It reaches the steps which lead to a small central portion with the above mentioned kitchen coming up on its left and an area where sandal wood is ground into paste for daily consumption, on the right. *Chandanam* (sandal wood) is required every day in sizable quantities and forms an important item much in demand. On the long steps, at a corner, a Brahmin sits reading the sacred *Ramayanam* almost throughout the time the shrine of Sree Narasimha Swamy is kept open. Three figures of Sree Hanuman, one in *Jeeva Dandam* (live ivory) one in silver and the other in brass are placed on the stand as witnesses to this rendering. The second big double gate of the *Nalambalam*, facing south, is also located on the left beyond the kitchen.

One of the key areas is reached. A few paces to the right of the steps on which the *Ramayanam* chanting is done is the famous shrine of the second of the three main Deities of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple – *Thekkaidathu* Sree Narasimha Swamy. The qualification of *Thekkaidathu* is added on as this shrine is situated to the south of the main sanctum. A few shallow steps of the



*Sopanam* lead to the two-roomed enclosure of this extremely powerful Deity. A pair of modestly proportioned Dwarapalakas guard each side of the outer entrance. Their faces are calm and devoid of the ferocity normally apparent in such figures, perhaps as a contrast with the awesome Presence inside. The idol is of *Panchaloham*, combination of five metals.<sup>5</sup> The roof is tiled with copper sheets. The outer walls are completely covered with mural paintings. As paintings are being dealt with separately in this chapter itself, they are not being considered now. (Indepth study of this shrine is taken up in the chapter *The Inner Radiance*).

At close proximity, yet another enclosure stands with three doors, two massive double doors facing south and north and the small double door facing east which gives access to the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. This is the *Cheruchuttu* which is the immediate surrounding area of the sanctum sanctorum. On entering, to the left is an alcove reached by one single granite step with a beautiful mural on the backwall. An elegantly worked cradle in ivory hangs suspended on four chains. In this is placed an idol of *Iluppa* wood; the identification marks or even normal characteristics have been erased from it by time and circumstances. This idol is offered to the members of the Royal Family as they leave this area after worship, to place in veneration to their eyes. Many explanations are offered about it but the most probable one seems to be that at one time it must have been fashioned as a sort of model for the main Idol which was also of *Iluppa* wood. Its age is not known. People are seen to place idols of baby Krishna in this cradle, to get an offspring.

The floor is paved fully with granite worn smooth by the march of countless feet spanning centuries. In many of the joints, melted lead is seen poured to cement them. The belief is that beneath the floor lies the famous Ocean of Milk on which Sree Padmanabha Swamy is visualised as reclining. The lead, or so the belief goes, is poured in the joints to prevent the milk from seeping out. In the miracles listed in the Temple there is recorded mention of the flow of milk.

The eastern side comprises the wooden fretwork wall which is also the wall of the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. A *Sopanam* descends into the middle of the *Cheruchuttu* from the door in this portion. In many places in this area there is ample use of hanging lamps including two extremely decorative ones similar to the two outside the front *Mandapam*. At the extreme northern end of the eastern side is the long shrine of Sree Rama Swamy with barred frontage of brass rods. There are two sets of standing figures in *Panchaloham* representing Sree Rama, with Lakshmana on His right and Sree Sita Devi on His left. The two brothers stand with bow in hand and all are in royal attire. The second set

5. *Panchaloham* – alloy of gold, silver, copper, tin and iron.



of three figures which are placed to the right of the first set appears devoid of splendid regal finery. Only the bows are carried in their hands. They portray Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in their exile in the forest. A silver Ganapathy Bhagavan (one of the <sup>three</sup> ~~two~~ contained in the Temple) sits in front of them, to a side.<sup>90</sup> Near the entrance to the shrine is seen a standing figure in *Panchaloham* of Hanuman, hands folded as usual in an attitude of humble devotion. It is a charming idol and is placed on top of a base of stone.

In the middle of this hall, occupying the major portion of it, is the far famed platform of one single granite block which is the *Mandapam* continuous with the inner sanctum area on the outside. It is known as the *Ottakkal Mandapam* or *Mandapam* of one stone, or if the Sanskritised usage is resorted to, as the *Ekasila Mandapam* which all mean platform of a single rock. It is reached by a *Sopanam* in front of it having four steps on either side and a small platform which could be the fifth step at a slightly less elevation than the surface of the main platform. Two single high stone steps on the right and left of the platform also give access to it. The *Mandapam* is massive and smooth and rectangular in appearance, about eighteen feet long and eighteen and a half feet broad and twelve and a half feet in thickness. The masterly skill of the craftsmen finds eloquent expression in its actual physical construction, as well as in the fine carvings of the pillars and borders of the platform. The pillars total fourteen (one of them at a slight slant) of which ten are square and four are circular and all are highly ornamented. Today the entire upper border as well as the fourteen pillars are covered with gold (Refer chapter *Autograph of Ages* – Modern History – Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma.) Inscriptions are seen on the sides of the platform (Refer chapter *Milestones of Time*). The ceiling is pure artistry in itself and is made of well seasoned wood abounding in carvings. Of special note are the <sup>91</sup> ~~nine~~ <sup>ten</sup> panels containing the ~~nine~~ <sup>ten</sup> planets, collectively termed *Navagrahas* (in literal translation), in bold relief. They are superbly executed and the interplay of light and shade, along with indepth carving lend a feeling of movement to them. The work of this platform was started and completed under the direct supervision of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma in 906 ME/1731 AD. It took the tireless efforts of a huge task force comprising men, horses and elephants for forty two days to bring the stone from Thirumala, a hill in the city, to the Temple (Refer chapter *Legends and Folklore*). Two versions exist as to how the Karamana river was crossed by this massive block of granite. According to one version, a bridge was specially made to bring it across while the other states that the very course of this river was artificially changed to facilitate the onward movement of the stone. One point that merits mention here is that contrary to popular belief, this *Mandapam* was not an innovation of this King; records tell us of the existence of an *Ottakkal Mandapam* in the earlier days also.



An unusual aspect of this platform other than its structural uniqueness is that there is no space in between dividing it and the inner shrine boundary. The *Ottakkal Mandapam* is an extension of the sanctum in concept because of the absence of the normal *Sopanam* (the flight of steps from a small front platform immediately outside the sanctum). The front platform facing the shrine is separate and does not touch it as is the common rule. This notable deviation from the accepted norms of construction is seen only in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and Thiruvattar Sree Adi Kesava Temple, which closely resemble each other. As such, it is monolithic in symbolic nature conjoining the sanctum, though the stones of the flooring of the sanctum and levels are physically different. This throws light on the principle which forbids anything placed or falling on this *Mandapam* being taken back as it becomes the property of the Temple. It is a commonly understood principle that what is kept in the sanctum belongs to the Lord and as this platform is the symbolic extension, this rule covers it as well. (Refer chapter *The Inner Radiance* for more elaboration) Many hanging lamps and bells are suspended all around the platform. Three sets of double doors open on to it from the sanctum, from a slightly raised area. On either side of the middle double doors or *Natas*, on two blocks, engraved with a single figure each stand the figures of the Dwarapalakas of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Jayan and Vijayan, rich in details and majestic in stature. They display burnished copper hue and are believed to have been wrought of *Panchaloham*, a common and accepted medium for idol manufacture.

The three sets of double doors stand at a distance of six feet each. Sage Vilvamangalam is said to have beseeched the Lord to limit His gigantic form to three times the length of his six foot *Dandu*<sup>6</sup> or staff so as to enable him to go round the figure and perform worship satisfactorily. His request was granted and the Lord reduced His immense form to eighteen feet. The three doors stand as a reminder to this. They are massive in girth and are well secured and locked with the old traditional locks and keys. Plated with a brass, copper and zinc alloy (some say it is only brass), they deviate from the usual lotus design doors and are profusely decorated with the figures of celestial beings and designs. The first *Nata* has Varaha, Krishna, Hanuman, Kshetrapalakas etc, the second offers Ganapathy, Siva, Vishnu, Mahalakshmi, Garuda, Hanuman, Venugopala and so on while the third displays a fine *Anantasayee*, sitting Ganapathy, Kaliyamardanam, Siva, Parvathi, Vishnu and the like. Designs, geometrical and floral, increase its wonderful artistry. On each door are attached eight vertical lines of silver bells with four bells in a horizontal row having a gold bell each for the two side door frames and three gold bells for the central

6. *Dandu* - this stick of prescribed specifications is mandatory for sanyasies or those who have embraced the monastic orders.



one. On frames running on top and on the two sides of each *Nata*, removable silver containers are affixed for lamps.

The *Sreekovil* or *Garbha Griham*, the womb or sanctum sanctorum of the Temple, its very heart and soul, is reached through these *Natas*. It is also a rectangular, two divisioned structure (*dwithalam*) measuring twenty four feet in length, eighteen feet in breadth and forty feet in height, the first portion being a long, corridor type of area and the second across the high inner step being the chamber where the main Deity is consecrated. The sanctum is double-storied, ridged and tiled with copper sheets with three globular gold *Stupikalasas* (crest pots) one each, over the three doorways. On either side of these pots is affixed a gold trident-shaped emblem, which is one of the signs of Vishnu. Another crest pot and similar symbol stand by themselves on the roof of the *Ottakkal Mandapam*, once again indicating its special sanctity. This lofty *Vimanam* (roof) is built in Dravidian style. The inner walls as well as the exterior portions carry mural paintings, many of which depict the stories detailed in the great Indian epics. It is claimed that when the ear is pressed to the outer wall of the sanctum, especially near the area where the Lord's feet rest, the resonance of *Pranavam* or *Omkaram* (the primordial sound vibration) can be heard. Others claim that it is the muted roar of the Ocean of Milk.

The sacred recumbent figure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy on the great three coiled serpent chief Ananta — the *Anantasayana Vighram* — looks upwards, ~~faces the east~~ with head to the south and feet to the north and can be viewed only through the three doors. This Idol itself has been acclaimed as a marvel in iconography. Made of a composition known as *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam*, the inner spaces of this Idol are lined with the twelve thousand and eight sacred *Salagramas* (which represent Vishnu) brought on elephant back from the water beds of the Gandaki river in Nepal. The outer frame is made of the wood of certain medicinal trees or plants in thin rattan-like proportions. The Lord is represented as being in *Yoga Nidra* or cosmic slumber, eyes partially shut, reclining straight on Ananta, with a lotus rising from the stalk from the navel. Brahma, the Creator, is seated in it. Higher up in the background a collection of celestials are depicted representing the thirty three crore odd different ranges of divinities. The left hand of the Deity holds His favourite bloom, the lotus and displays a mystic symbol, ~~the *Chin Mudra*, symbolising the oneness of the universal and individual souls — the *Paramatma* and the *Jeevatma*,~~ and below the right hand is Sree *Parameswara* fashioned out of a *Saiva Salagrama* stone which is also somewhat unique. The five hoods of Ananta, whose body is thrice coiled to form a couch for his supreme Master, hold an umbrella above His head. The tail of the serpent too is clearly shown. According to the Tantries of this Temple, the Ananta figure acts as the *Peetham* or base of the God, as such the *Salagramas* would be present only in the figure of Sree Padmanabha



Swamy and not in Ananta also. The entire figure stands at a good elevation from ground level. The actual length is put at eighteen feet which may be at variance with normal measurements adopted for Vishnu idols based on the *Dasathalam* principle of iconography. Since no records are available giving the *Thalam* (unit of measurement) of the idols and as it is not permitted to measure a consecrated idol, we can only conclude that the Idols would be possessing the optimum specifications of measurement as the ancients in their wisdom would have done only the very best.

This Idol is placed as an *Uttama Yoga Moorthy*. The scale to measure *Uttamam*, *Madhyamam* and *Adhamam* is the number of divinities that encircle or are present near the main Idol, as per some schools of thought. Vishnu Idols are normally of the first classification.

It is unwise even to attempt to restrict to the persuasion of the humble pen the beauty and grandeur of this magnificent Figure or to try and capture within the pages of a book the wonder of the sublime face or *Thirumukham*. The different expressions projected on the face of the *Yoga Moorthy* or Lord in *Yoga* which is always serene but superimposed with the aura of benign grace, the sweetness of the smile that has captured the hearts of generations, all these cannot be explained but have to be experienced.

The figures of the two Sages, Markandeya and Bhrigu, as well as those of the two consorts of the Lord, Devies Lakshmi and Bhoomi, all in sitting position and of reasonably big proportions, the previously mentioned figures of Brahma and celestial hordes including Narada, Garuda, Tumburu, and the Seven Sages, <sup>the Sun,</sup> and the Sanakadi quartette are all made of *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam*. <sup>the Moon</sup> As such, no water oblation is performed on any of them, the main Idol included, only worship with flowers. This Idol is cleaned by gently passing peacock feathers over it to remove the previous days' flowers etc., by the priests, who have special right of entry into the *Sreekovil* and privileges therein.

For the purpose of *Abhishekam* in the central portion of the sanctum and in front of main Idol, on a platform are the standing Idols of Maha Vishnu about two feet tall, in gold, with figures of the two Goddesses on His either side. These three Idols are brought on to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* for rituals with liquid components and so on. On the left of the Lord, on this platform itself is His silver idol in sitting posture. This is the *Siveli Bimbam* or *Utsava Bimbam* used for the outer processions. Normally only *Moola Vighram* and *Utsavam* or *Siveli Vighras* are seen in temples. Here the *Abhisheka* Idol is also seen for reasons explained above. The two Garuda conveyances of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy too are kept within this sanctum (Turn to chapter, *The Inner Radiance* for this entire section). Very restricted and regulated entry into the sanctum sanctorum even for the priests of the Temple continues to be in force.



It is not known whether there is space between the rear part of the main Idol and the western wall of the sanctum sanctorum. Not even those who move inside the sanctum, the *Swamiyar* included, have the permission to go behind the main Idol or try and see the area behind it. It is like a forbidden area. The belief holds strong about the presence of *Palaazhi* or the Ocean of Milk, there. An oft repeated narration is in circulation about how one of the priests tied his ring to a string and threw it behind the reclining form of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in an attempt to gauge the depth. The ring would not touch the bottom despite extending the string and finally the priest got frightened and pulled it back. The ring and the thread came out wet. This further lends weight to this belief.

On the tenth of the Malayalam month of *Medom* (April) when the sun is at its zenith, the rays of the rising sun directly fall on the standing Idol inside the sanctum as though in firey homage to the Emperor of all creation.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to resort to a seeming digression and include here the not commonly known details of the compound of which the idols inside the inner shrine except Siva are made—the *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam*. This is the contribution of Kerala to temple culture and in use mainly only in Kerala temples. Yet here also it is comparatively rare perhaps due to the very complicated processes involved.

### Katu-Sarkara-Yogam

After selecting a good tree from an area where high quality trees like *Karinjali* (Acacia Catechu), *Devatharu* (Cedrios Deodara), *Chandanam*, (Sandalwood or Santalam Album) etc. grow, it should be cut and brought to the location where the work is to be carried out. In conformity with the specifications of the idol to be fashioned, a *Pasam* or rope scale should be made. The waist measurement and chest measurement should be demarcated on it. Representing the bones as it were, as the continuation of the waist in downward trend, at the extremities, the feet measurements are arrived at and in like manner the extremities from the chest area lead to the arms according to a measurement fixed for them, along with the measurements for the entire back. The areas of the palms, feet, ears and nose should be constructed by tying copper plates of suitable dimensions on to the basic structure. This is known as the *Soolam* (skeleton) of the idol.

Four *palams*<sup>7</sup> (a local unit of weight) of *Thiruvatta-pasa* (Pinus Roxlreghir), which is the gum from the common gum tree, is taken along with three *palams* of *Kundirikkam* (Boswelliz Serrata), five *palams* of *Gulgulu* (Commiphora Mukul), one *palam* of jaggery, eight *palams* of *Chenchalyam* (resin of Shorea Robusta) and three *palams* of *Kavi earth* (red lumber stone or red ochre) and

7. *Palam* – 34 grams 991 milligrams.



all these six ingredients are powdered well. This powder is put into an earthen pot, mixed with equal portions of oil and ghee and rolled in this medium. The mixture is then cooked over fire till it reaches the consistency of honey. Thereafter it is removed from the fire and before it cools, it is applied all over the skeleton of the idol. Thus after the coating termed *Ashtabandhalepanam* which binds the frame is carried out in the manner described above, coating of the nerves or *Nadi Bandhanam* commences. The fine fibre of the hardened coconut husk (husk of *Cocos Nucifera*) is removed, washed and cleaned well and is twisted from left to right in three spirals and tied on to this skeletal frame constituting *Ida, Pingala and Sushumnam*, which are the three vital nerves of the spinal cord along with the four other nerve centres known as *Pusha, Yasaswini, Shankhini* and *Kuhu*. Collectively they represent the *Saptanadies* or the seven nerve centres of the body.<sup>8</sup>

Sand from *Jangala Desam* or barren land, *Anoopa Desam* or marshy land and from plain land are brought, washed and cleaned separately. Three different types of concoctions consisting of (1) a combination of *Karinjali* (*Acacia Catechu*) and *Maruthu* (*Terminalia Paniculata*), are prepared and boiled together to a thick consistency, (2) *Nalpamaram*, decoction made out of the bark of four fig trees viz *Athi, Ithi, Arayalu* and *Peralu* (*Ficus Racemosa*, *Ficus Gibbosa*, *Ficus Religiosa* and *Ficus Bengalensis*) and (3) decoction of *Kolarakku* (lac) are prepared. The sand is put in each of these concoctions for a period of ten days so that it is made to imbibe these solutions and dried thereafter. It is then put in *Thriphala Kashayam* for a duration of ten days and redried. *Thriphala Kashayam* is made of three ingredients, *Katukka* (*Tirmernalia Chebrila*), *Nellikka* (Gooseberry or *Embilica Officinalis*) and *Thannikka* (*Tirminalia Ballerica*). River sand is powdered well and a portion equal to  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the quantity of each of the three types of previously prepared sand added to it. This mixture of medicinal sands is ground into a paste using the *Thriphala Kashayam* as the liquid base. *Yavam* (Barley-*Hordeum Vulgare*), wheat and the leaves of *Kasavu* (*Memecylon Edule*) are separately powdered and mixed and  $\frac{1}{8}$ th of the prepared sand added to it. It is wetted well with the water of the matured coconut and ground daily for ten days to make it into a composition. Equal powdered quantities of *Thiruvatta-pasa* (gum of the common gum tree), *Gulgulu*, *Kundirikkam* and *Chenchalyam* (refer previous text for all above three) are added in a proportion of  $\frac{1}{16}$ th of the same to the special sand and the mixture ground well adding honey to it. Equal quantities of *Chukku* (dried ginger),

- 
8. 1. *Pusha* - *Arakku Calotropis Gigantea*.  
 2. *Yasaswini* - *Marikunni* - *Argyreia Speciosa*.  
 3. *Shankhini* - *Vinca Pusilla*.  
 4. *Kuhu* - *Alantha* - *Zizyphus Jujuba*.

*These are the botanical terms seen for these words.*



Pepper, Turmeric and *Thrippali* (long pepper or Piper Longum) are powdered together and  $\frac{1}{24}$ th measure added to the same and unified by mixing honey, milk and ghee and grinding them. As the next stage, *Plavin-pasa* (leaf latex-*Artocarpus Integrifolia*) and the inner substance of the *Koovala-kayu* (*Aegla Marmelos*) are taken in equal quantities and ground.  $\frac{1}{15}$ th of this substance is added to the sand and re-ground adding a little bit of oil. *Kumkumam* (composite powder of red colour), *Chandanam* (sandal), *Aritharam* (*Acacia Parnesiana*), *Kottam* (*Sassurea Lappa*), *Karpooora* (Camphor), *Akil* (Indian Cedar) and *Gorochana* (Benzar-extract from gall region of oxen) are powdered and  $\frac{1}{32}$ nd of the sand is added and ground in an oil got by pounding the leaf of *Kasavu* (refer prior text) to powder. *Kasthuri* (musk) is added to a slightly powdered mixture of gold, silver, river sand, sand from the crab's hole, sea sand, sand from the farmer's plough, sand from the ant hill, sand from the vegetable patches, sand got from the hooves of the bull and sand from the elephant tusks. This mixture is again added to the prepared sand. This composition is deposited in a *Kashayam* or decoction made from the resin of the *Iluppa* tree (*Bassia Longifolia*). The same is boiled and cooked for five days and thereafter ground. A quantity of coconut husk fibre equal to  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the mixture is cut into small bits and mixed with this sand to which the gum of *Koovalam* and gum of *Plavu* (refer previous text for both ingredients) have been added. The same is pounded for ten days to make it into a composite whole. This composition is applied separately on the different parts of the frame of the idol which acts as its skeleton and on which the *Nadi Bandhanam* (amalgamating the nerves of the skeleton through special processes) has already been accomplished. It is rubbed well into those parts. This particular method is not to apply this mixture in thick layers but to give a thin coating with the mud paste. Now it is time to introduce the required characteristics of the idol on to the body which covers the frame. Pure silk on which the gum of leaf latex has been smeared is wrapped completely round the different parts of the body over and above the silk, equal proportions of powdered river sand, *Kozhipparal* (a specific rock ground to powder) and black coloured stones found on the river bed, are ground and daily mashed into a paste for the duration of one month in a decoction of *Thriphala*, gum of *Plavu* and gum of *Koovalam* (refer previous text for all three). A thin coating of the same is applied all over the idol and dried. An application of *Sankhu* powder (powdered conch) is made on the idol giving it a whitening effect. Required decorations and ornaments are worked on the surface enhancing the grandeur of the idol.

One can see from the ingredients used in the *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam* for the construction of the idols that they are all medicinal. Just as the human body is protected with a natural medicinal coverage, the same concept is extended to the idol to which a living form is being bestowed.



This is the process of *Katu-Sarkara-Yogam* in brief. Even this partially insufficient description is enough to project the greatly complicated procedure which goes into the formation of a *Katu-Sarkara* Idol. As such it is of no surprise that idols of this nature, though a speciality of Kerala, are so rare even in the land of their origin.

### **Cheruchuttu (continued)**

Before descending the steps from the front platform, as one stands on the top most step or small area of the *Sopanam* and gazes down on the design-worked gold border of the *Ottakkal Mandapam*, the central portion which is in line with the middle door (representing the heart of the Lord) takes on the appearance of a plaque. On it are inscribed words to the effect that this *Swarna Alankara Mandapam* (platform decorated with gold) was submitted to Sree Padmanabha Swamy in all humility by Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma. The date of the Maharaja's birth and the date of completion of the gold work are both inscribed (Refer *Autograph of Ages* Modern History – Sree Padmanabha Dasa Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma).

On the second level of the double storied construction of the *Sreekovil* (sanctum), on blocks of wood stand four more than average sized and eye-catching figures of the *Koshtha Devatas* of the four directions. On the east and north are Vishnu and Brahma respectively, standing for *Satva Gunam*. Sree Narasimha comes on the west projecting *Rajo Gunam* and on the south is seen Dakshinamoorthy (Siva) representing *Tamo Gunam*. All these figures are worked in wood.

The *Koshtha Devatas* are situated in the midportion of each side. Many wooden figures large enough to be seen from a distance appear along the entire length all around. They too are in wood and also station themselves on blocks. These bracket figures can be roughly identified necessarily standing from a distance and they follow traditional Kerala norms in their construction. Normally they portray a battle between the celestials and the demons or an episode of test of integrity. The stories which are projected are *Kiratharjuneyam* and *Devi Mahatmyam* while rarely the *Ramayanam* too appears. However, *Kiratharjuneyam* is worked here.

Some figures are blocked from vision due to structural obstructions. Those which lend themselves to identification are Arjuna standing on one foot in penance, Parvathi and Siva, Arjuna with the boar, Arjuna bending the bow, Kirata bending the bow, Kirata and Arjuna attacking each other with bows, Arjuna performing *Puja* to the *Siva Lingam* and Siva bestowing the *Pasupathastram* on Arjuna.

Once again the absence of discrimination of the Deities, is emphasised as it is a story involving Siva which is projected on the top areas of the *Sreekovil* of



Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The only figures of size comparable to these can be seen in the Erattaappan Temple, Peruvanam in Thrissur District.

On reaching ground level again and passing the Sree Ramaswamy shrine on the eastern side of the *Cheruchuttu* the northern area is reached. Another big double door in wood with lotuses and bound with brass stands exactly opposite to the first entrance facing south. The northern *Nata* is also termed the *Swargavathil* (gate to Heaven) and has its own importance in the scheme of affairs as will be seen in the chapter *Worship of the Celestial*. A little to the left, a single big rectangular granite step leads to a short broad veranda fronting the shrine of Sree Vishvaksenan. This big idol in sitting posture with four hands is also fashioned out of *Katu-Sarkara* (Refer chapter, *The Inner Radiance*).

A fairly large and very old ivory cradle is suspended in an alcove in the southern part of the *Cheruchuttu* for the Lord's use.<sup>9</sup>

To emerge from the *Cheruchuttu* the same entrance on the southern side which gave entry to this enclosure is used. After worshipping Sree Narasimha Swamy the broad southern corridor of the *Nalambalam* (outer enclosure of the inner area) continues in the westerly direction. Many small *Belikkals* situated individually and collectively, representing various potencies are seen especially on the right. The three outer walls of the sanctum sanctorum filled totally with a vast variety of murals adorn the right side of the south, west and north inner corridors.

To the left of the western inner corridor at its point of commencement is an area oft mentioned in the medieval history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the famed *Mahabharathakonu*. This place has stood witness time and again to deliberations of the Temple authorities and the later *Ettara Yogas* on a whole graph of Temple related issues. It is used in the present day also for certain functions like the assumption and laying down of office of the Periya Nambi and other chief priests. A very big full length mural drawn to scale of the Lord as *Anantasayee* dominates the major portion of the wall. It is the biggest temple mural in Kerala. In a square in the front ceiling two big fish are sculpted.

The southern side of the *Nalambalam* has many distinctive areas. A few steeply cut granite steps lead to an elevated section with a small one-room shrine having a frontage of broad wooden planks. There are two small idols, one in *Panchaloham* of Sree Veda Vyasa in sitting posture with one leg across the knee and one of Aswatthama standing close by. They face the west (Refer chapter *The Inner Radiance*). On the wall facing the shrine a small standing

9. This cradle finds a place in the *Unnuneeli Sandesam* a 14th century work of ongoing popularity and in *Bala Marthanda Vijayam* by Devaraja Kavi of the 18th century.



figure of Garuda has found its place within. Two small Narasimha Moorthies are engraved above him.

Crossing this area, a demarcated rectangular space, like a carpet, is seen on the floor. It is used by devotees to prostrate at the lotus feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The area where the sacred feet point is located by a narrow and long gold covered window-like representation done on the outer side of the sanctum wall on the south. People generally touch this window and place their hands to their eyes in homage and it is here that the resonance from within the sanctum identified as the *Pranavam* is said to be discerned. This spot is deemed to be exceptionally sacred as Sree Padmanabha Swamy is believed to be always present here with special potency. On either side of this spot stand two massive, undecorated lamps which burn a perpetual flame each. They have an origin of many unrecorded years. They are enclosed within two railed cage-like constructions in wood.

Further on to the right is the back portion of the Sree Vishwakshena's shrine, succeeded by a comparatively small and plain square platform with a roof on top. The inner ceiling alone carries decorative flower carvings. It is known as *Kariva Mandapam*, *Thiruvolakka Mandapam* or *Thirunokku Mandapam* and originally rice for the daily use of the Temple was measured on it. Musicians in Temple employ would sit on it and sing devotional songs during certain occasions. That procedure continues.<sup>10</sup>

Immediately beyond this platform, to its right, is the *Swargavathil Nata* of the inner area which has already been described and on the left another pair of handsome wooden double doors, which form the last of the three entrances to the *Nalambalam* enclosure, open to the north.

The ornate *Alankara Mandapam* of later vintage is situated to the left, after these entrances are crossed. Different from all other platforms contained in this Temple, it is very low, only one step above floor level. Used mainly for decorating the vehicles of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy, it would have obtained its name as a result. This structure is a fine example of artistry. It displays eight round pillars with designs and twelve square pillars carrying a multitude of carvings and decorative motifs including the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Some of the carvings on the pillars, which invite attention, are Hanuman carrying Rama on his shoulders, Vishnu riding on Garuda, *Ahalya-moksham* (salvation of Ahalya) and an enchanting representation of Vishnu playing on the percussion instrument known as *Etakka*. The sixty four arts of ancient India have been illustrated in sculpture on the bigger pillars. There is one pillar at the end facing the *Swargavathil Nata*, which is unusual and attracts special mention. It sports a western style cherub

10. Refer chapter 'Miracles' for origin of this Mandapam.



complete with wings holding in his hand a round bundle from which something seems to be spilling out. There is a belief that he is generous in granting of boons if approached with the right mind. The pillar right behind this one also offers a winged figure but the wings of this male celestial are sharp, pointed and oriental in shape in contrast to the rounded ones of the cherub-like figure earlier mentioned. In the ceiling, in nine sections and in bold relief are seen nine beautiful figures. Eight of them represent the celestial guardians of the eight directions the *Ashtadikpalakas* starting with Isa or Siva in the north-eastern corner as per the norms. The middle panel is Brahma with a *Kindi*<sup>11</sup> in one hand.

Behind this *Mandapam* on the extreme north stand a few individual rooms, used for storing commodities to be daily dispensed with, rooms where certain functionaries responsible for the religious requirements of the Namboodiripads (the Tantries) operate and the cell where the Tantri conducts a special *Puja* before the *Utsavam* twice a year. The right side is the *Abhisravana Mandapam* which has already been subjected to a detailed descriptive narration.

The eastern corridor of the *Nalambalam* is reached thus with the huge side platforms and the central corridor which do not need further repetition in terms of elaboration.

The structural description of this magnificent abode of the Divine is far from complete without the description of a couple of areas including the vital area housing Sree Krishna of Thiru Ampati which has only come in for transient mention thus far.

Through the northern *Nata* (entrance) to the first inner enclosure, one steps out to the vast northern courtyard. Immediately as the step is crossed, across the doorway, low on the right hand wall, is a stone plaque in which four lines are engraved giving the name of the Maharaja – Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma – and the year of the renovation of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple undertaken during his time which reads as 4th month of Malayalam year 1110, English year 1934, under the asterism of *Pooyam* (*Pushyam* in Sanskrit). This renovation is the latest to date. A *Deepashala* or *Vilakku Madom* of magnificent proportions covering this considerable area goes all around the outer portion of the *Nalambalam*. It is erected away from the *Nalambalam* wall and stands all by itself. It comprises wooden frames fixed on horizontal and vertical planks on which holders for lighting lamps are affixed. These lamps are innumerable and when lit they transport one to another world of divinity which fills the eyes and the heart with emotions difficult to project by words. The lavish utilisation of the lamp supports is also typical of Kerala Temple culture.

11. *The Kindi is a vessel with a long narrow spout to one side and is typically of the Malayala Nadu.*



In this Temple, lighting of outer lamps or any lamps for that matter has claimed high priority even from bygone days. The Temple records off and on make mention of offerings of this nature performed by the rulers.

Turning sharp to the left, on arriving at the outer area through the northern entrance, the broad granite paved path with pillars on the right and covered at the top with sheets takes one near to the *Dhwaja Sthambham* in silver of the Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Temple. The flag mast and the main *Belikkal* meant only for the Thiru Ampati as also the surrounding area are in the open courtyard, which is also in compliance with Kerala temples. The importance of this Temple inside the main complex and the fact that it operated as an independent, full fledged Temple and not as a subsidiary shrine are underscored by the presence of its own separate flag mast, main *Beli* stone and *Namaskara Mandapam* where daily reading of the *Puranas* is done. It merits repetition that the Idol of Sree Krishna and *Salagrama* were brought from Gujarat by the descendants of Lord Krishna Himself, who were later known as Krishnan Vakakkar, under the leadership of Krishna Varman. They came from the Vrishni Kshathriya clan. The idol was consecrated on Friday 5th of *Chingom*, 1st ME, under star *Thiru Onam* in the presence of a full assembly of dignitaries, the five *Swaroopam* heads included. The flag-mast, which was silver plated in 938 ME/1763 AD as per *Mathilakam* Records, Volume 12, is now enclosed in silver. The silver plated *Belikkal* next to it contains an inscription mentioning Veera Veera Iravi Varma as Thrippappoor Mootha Thiruvadi or senior ruler of Travancore. The record is undated and damaged. Probably this stone might have been consecrated in his time. Constructed by Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma, along with the actual shrine for Lord Krishna, the *Deepagriham* for lighting of lamps and the cowshed, in 550 ME/1375 AD as recorded in the inscription found in the shrine, this *Namaskara Mandapam* is a gem of architectural excellence. Four heavily carved circular pillars between them possess sixteen outstanding carvings of small dimensions. These figures are of post-Pallava style which relates closely to typical Kerala idiom. The comparatively more prominently worked figure of Anasooya giving alms, on the south-western pillar or *Kanni-konu*, which is significant in construction codes, merits special mention. *Gopika Vastrapaharam* and *Bhikshatana Siva* are seen in another part of this pillar. The north-eastern pillar presents a fine figure of Veera Rama (Rama, the valiant warrior), Lakshmana and possibly Dasaratha are seen. The figures of Vyaghnapada Muni and Yakshi are noticed on the south-eastern pillar. An inscription is visible near the Yakshi stating that she was fashioned by Velayudha Perumal Adithya Ashari. On the north-west pillar a *Rajasik muni*, perhaps Parasurama is stationed. The wooden ceiling beautifully decorated and carrying scenes from Hindu mythology with figures of Vishnu, Siva, Lakshmi, Parvathi, the *Navagrahas* and so on are of undoubted distinction and pay eternal tribute to the skill of the



known and unknown masters of carving and sculpture. These works, according to Stella Kramisch, "*are tangible expressions of intangible ideas and are rated most superior for their latent, vivacity and abundance of sculptural embellishment*". The carving of Sree Hanuman on the outer panel with Garuda and Venugopala which faces the shrine is notable (Refer chapter *Legends and Folklore*). In passing, attention is invited to the delightful collection of Hanuman figures in varying poses which abound in the entire Temple complex. The four corners of the roof are supported by the mythical *Vyalies* standing on top of a small elephant each. Like the rest of the Thiru Ampati complex, it has escaped the ravages of fire. As such, Maharaja Marthanda Varma left this entire portion known as Thiru Ampati, this *Mandapam* included, untouched, during his massive renovation programme and they continue to exist in their original splendour.

As per the style of architecture and construction, this complex is the oldest part of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple dating to Sarvanganathan's time. The entire outer area of the main Sree Krishna Swamy shrine is covered with the *Vilakku Madom* for lighting of lamps doubling in places as an exterior wall. The modestly proportioned wooden double doors, complete with lotuses and brass trappings, give entry to this enclosure. On top of the door, carved in granite is the figure of Goddess Lakshmi with an elephant on either side. Two beautifully proportioned *Dwarapalakas* are erected on either side of these doors. Immediately as the enclosure is entered, steps lead up to a small *Belikkal* and straight on to the *Sopanam* which comprises one set of steps constructed frontways and reaching the two roomed sanctum of the Lord. An unusual feature is that here alone the two guards are females, they being *Dwarapalikas* and not *Dwarapalakas*. Concealed by the hanging lamps and wooden frames, they are not obviously visible. They carry no weapons and stand waiting to serve Him.

The figure of Lord Krishna as Parthasarathi is in standing posture and of reasonable height and made of granite. The outer walls of the actual sanctum are replete with murals mainly portraying scenes from the childhood of Krishna. A number of *Beli* stones are located on the south side, outside the inner shrine and the large hall is seen used for various *Vedic* sacrifices and rituals by the priests. The back of the shrine narrows to a little corridor with a low window set in the wall with lots of apertures, like fretwork. The outer western wall on the left of the shrine carries a painted representation of the *Chakram* which has been executed in larger dimensions here but is said to be a replica of the *Meru Chakram* found in the area of the big *Belikkal* of the main sanctum. On this side also there is a fairly large hall without decorations. Both the north and south sides, where the hall, like areas with fluted granite pillars and wooden rafters exist, are believed to have been once the rectangular cowshed put up around the sanctum sanctorum of Sree Krishna Swamy by Sarvanganathan



Adithya Varma centuries back. The Lord was thus popularly known as *Goshala Krishna* or Krishna, of the Cowshed. Due to its origin in and connections with in Krishna Bhoomi, a *Goshala* (cowshed) was constructed around the shrine with cows in it and for long, He was known as *Goshala Krishna*. The pipe like stone structure through which the water used for worship flows out into a square stone basin built under this outlet is on the northern wall of the sanctum. One interesting detail, which is also quoted to emphasise the age and the original situation in the forest, is the many depressions in the granite basin on its top outline. This is said to have been the result of continuous sharpening of arrows by rubbing them against this surface by the tribes who inhabited Anantankatu, the forest of Ananta the serpent. Ancient inscriptions also are found in this enclosure (See chapter *Milestones of Time*).

The code of worship in this Temple, which shares much in common with the main complex, is in certain areas distinct and different. It had only a five day festival at first but in the time of Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi was increased to ten days and brought on a par with that of the other two Deities. Still, even now Sree Krishna Swamy has His own separate route which is utilised for Him to join the *Siveli* processions and His own entry and exit point. The Tantries are common for the Temple as a whole. Certain procedural differences in conduct of rituals are noted.

With this the physical, architectural and sculptural representations and attempted descriptive analysis come to a conclusion with all its many imperfections and unintentional oversights. The architectural and sculptural extravaganza dedicated to the paramount Divinity by countless hands and hearts of unknown masters bear "*comparison only with great art of Greek and Roman sculptors who created petrified music dominated by sculptural rhythm.*"<sup>12</sup>

The Supreme Soul gives of Himself as *Jeevatman* to creation. This aspect is very much evident in Kerala architecture which follows the five-fold principles known as *Panchamayakosam*.

1. *Annamayakosam* or *Sivelippura* comprises the outer corridors where food used to be served. *Annam* is rice and is synonymous with food. When compared to the physical form it manifests as the gross body fed by food.
2. *Pranamaya Kosam* comes next, abounding in figures of animals, birds, human forms as they are or engaged in many types of activities all representing varied life. The main *Belikkal* falls within the orbit of this *Kosam*. The Temple is a mini universe and all the celestial guardians or protectors of cosmos are invoked here as concentrate active life force in

---

12. L.K. Bala Ratnam – *Ananthasayanam*.



this stone. It is the receiver of oblations which are a vital part of temple worship. *Pranan* means life force. When compared to the human body it is described as the life force which motivates and triggers off all actions.

3. *Manomayakosam* is the next stage wherein auxillary deities including the smaller *Belikkals* which vary in size and girth and are endowed with individual potencies of different, specific *Devas* or celestials, are seen. A supremely significant feature is the presence of the *Dhwaja Sthambham*, or in Temples where it is absent, the area dedicated to it. The flag staff represents the *Kundalini Sakti* which activates the five sense organs controlled by the mind. Here the areas of pure gross body aspect have been traversed and the sphere of the divines is reached which connects with mental awareness and perception. *Manomayakosam* is the mind of man which needs must be accommodated. The importance of the mind is tremendous.
4. *Vijnanamayakosam* is where the raised platform (*Namaskara Mandapam*) facing the sanctum and other demarcated areas in the inner circle used for teaching and practising *Vedas*, for prayers (*Japas*) for performing ritualistic worship (*Pujas*) with flowers, fire etc. and for erudite chanting, are situated. *Vijnanam* means knowledge. In relation to the body, it is the seat of knowledge and thought or the thinking brain.
5. *Anandamayakosam* is the actual sanctum sanctorum of the temple where the main idol infused with divinity and deified is installed. In comparison with the mortal frame, it is none other than the seat of bliss, call it the heart or call it the *Sahasradala Padmam* or the thousand petalled, inverted lotus atop the brain, which is the master controller of the total human being.

## Bronzes

Due to the presence of certain exceptional bronzes especially among the lamps, it will not be inappropriate if a small section is devoted to them.

In the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple there are six distinctive types of lamps used for the sacred ritual *Deeparadhana* (where fire is used as the medium of worship). They are the seven tiered lamp, five-wick lamp, the snake lamp, the Garuda lamp, the pot lamp and the camphor lamp. The Garuda lamp is unusual. It is uncommon that so many types of lamps are used during the same oblation.

The four *Deepa Kanyakas* or maidens with lamps in front of the *Abhishravana Mandapam*, as well as the two in much bigger proportions flanking the eastern entrance to the *Nalambalam* are rated among the fine



specimens of bronze statuary. The two *Dwarapalakas* on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* fashioned in *Panchaloham* but deviating from the usual proportions of the metals, have invited much attention. Along with the two in the Ettumanoor Temple they are considered as rare work.

The shrine of Sree Raghava Perumal in the *Cheruchuttu* contains two sets of three figures of Sree Rama, Lakshmana and Sree Sita Devi. The set which is devoid of ornamentation displays the period when they lived in the forests *Vanavasam*. They are Kerala bronzes. The other three are decorated and present the royal appearance. They identify with the Chola style of bronzes.

The *Kavara Vilakku* stands before the *Abhisravana Mandapam* and has been much acclaimed, so also the two towering lamps called *Rama* and *Lakshmana* in the Temple ground. Certain beautiful specimens of the hanging lamps like the ones with the figure of a man with folded hands in Nayik style are also seen inside.

Another unusual feature comes to light when the bells suspended all around from the rafter shoe on the exterior western wall of the sanctum and in a few other areas, are examined. From the tongue of each of these bells hangs suspended a metal banian leaf, which when compared to the size of the bell, is large. From a distance these leaves seem to be made of silver. It is doubtful if any other temple in Kerala can display this type of bells of older vintage.

## Arts

The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was from undated times a venue for temple arts and skills, a platform for display of merit by masters from a multitude of avenues. Great was the encouragement extended to them and the rulers were ever ready and generous in extending patronage and showering gifts on the deserving. Men of name and fame have left their imprints on the rich tapestry of the art of the Temple. Not only grand masters but because of them their many attendants, drew support from within the four walls of this sublime edifice. It could be rightly termed an institution also in one sense as this Temple not only saw to the spiritual and religious aspects which of course were its fundamental concern, but it fed and supported many, encouraged arts and their many derivations, patronised education, religious instruction and scholars in a magnitude rare in temple history.

## Active Arts

### Music

From the scrolls relating to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple interesting information can be gathered about some of the earlier musical instruments. A record of the medieval era in the Malayalam year 676 corresponding to



1500 AD which falls during the rulership of Pooruruttathi Thirunal Iravi Iravi Varma, reads the royal order for the use of certain musical instruments in the service of the Perumal, Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Since it is difficult to translate the names of some among the fourteen instruments mentioned, they are being recorded with their original names which assume the colour of archaic or Tamil toned Malayalam. They are:

1. *Periya Ochu Changku* – പെരിയ ഒച്ചു ചക് (big snail-like conch) – 2 in number
2. *Varppu Mathalom* – വാർപ്പു മത്തളം (big drum played horizontally) – 1 in number
3. *Ake Uluvu* – ആകെ ഉലുവ് - 4
4. *Mathu Ochu Etukkai* – മത്ത് ഒച്ചു ഇടുകൈ (a stringed hand drum) - 1
5. *Pidakom* – പിടകം -1
6. *Kuzhal* (piped instrument) – കുഴൽ - 1
7. *Chillithalam* – (disc with stick to beat on it) - ചില്ലിത്താളം -1
8. *Thiru Ampati Changku* – (conch) – തിരു ആമ്പാടി ചക് - 1
9. *Kannankodan Changku* – (conch) – കണ്ണൻകോടൻ ചക് - 1
10. *Vadakkan Marayan Udukk* – വടക്കൻ മാരായൻ ഉടുക്ക് (a small hand instrument producing musical sounds when shaken) - 1
11. *Pirakkadai Marayan Etakkai* – പിറക്കടൈ മാരായൻ ഇടക്കൈ (another type of stringed drum-like instrument) - 1
12. *Kulathoor Changku* – കുളത്തൂർ ചക് (another type of conch) - 1
13. *Etakkai* – ഇടക്കൈ (Refer serial number eleven) - 2
14. *Kombu* – കൊമ്പ് (a curved horn-like piped instrument) - 1

The Malayalam names have been written as seen in that record)

This King also ordered that the *Sankhu* or *conch* so dear to Vishnu and sacred in Vaishnava worship and the *Kombu* be played early morning connecting the first *Puja* in the Temple.<sup>13</sup>

The practice of blowing the conch every morning as the sanctum sanctorum opens for the first pre-dawn worship continues. It is also sounded when the Deities are brought to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* for *Abhishekam* and subsequently taken back as well as during *Deeparadhana* and during the time *Nivedyam* is offered. Similarly when the Deity leaves the sanctum and returns to it after *Siveli*, the conch is blown.

13. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 26, Ola 233.



A man plays on the *Etakkai*, a percussion instrument suspended by a type of belt and slung over the shoulder on the left. It has bobbins and strings which regulate the sound produced with the fingers. Stanzas from Jayadevan's *Ashtapati*, which has won all-round acceptance in Kerala temple music, is sung by the *Etakkai* player before the noon and evening *Deeparadhana*. This custom got discontinued for a time and has recently been re-started. The other sets of musical instruments continuing to be in daily use in the Temple are *Nagaswaram*, three in number, *Thakil* two, *Sruti* one and *Kaimani* two.<sup>14</sup> Among the *Nagaswaras* are seen ones which are short in length and commonly known as *Kurunkuzhal* (short pipe). They appear unique to this Temple.

Another group of instruments collectively known as *Pani Kottu*, in use in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are *Thimila* – two, *Veekka Chenda* – two, *Chengala* – two; *Shankhu* and *Etakkai* which are used separately.

The music inside, like chamber music, is described as more subtle, increasing in force as it moves out of the interior regions.

The musical *Seva* (service) to the Deity on certain special occasions is being touched upon. On the day when the asterism is *Thiru Onam* which is Sree Padmanabha Swamy's own star, every month, during the second round of the *Siveli* procession, the *Nagaswaram* players facing the Deities move in the reverse direction the complete distance of the south *Sivelippura* up to the mid point of the western *Sivelippura*. From here to the turning of this corridor to the north, the conch is blown, and the flute players proceed to play on the flutes up to the mid point of the northern *Sivelippura*. The *Pambu Nadam* (music coming from the snake charmer's pipe) accompanies the procession from this junction to the *Dhwaja Sthambham*.

## Music during the Alpashi and Painkuni Utsavas

During the two *Utsavas* of ten days duration each and on the annual *Swargavathil Ekadesi* day, five artists who are employed by the Palace and who are known as the *Mullamoottu Bhagavathers* render their service. They comprise two vocalists, one violinist, one who sounds the *Sruti* and one *Mridangam* player.

The *Ghattiyams* which total eighty three in number and are all different and mainly in Sanskrit and Tamil are recited in praise of the Lord after each *Deeparadhana* including the festivals. *Ragas* played during those days, when and where each should be introduced etc were systematised by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal.

- 
14. 1. *Nagaswaram* – a piped instrument broad at the base with notations.
  2. *Thakil* – a type of drum.
  3. *Sruti* – harmonium.
  4. *Kaimani* – cymbals.



In the eastern *Nata* the *Siveli* procession is accompanied by the *Kalyani Ragam* on all ten days. The *Ragas* played at the western *Nata* for the noon and night *Siveli* procession are listed below:

Day	Noon	Night
First day	No Siveli	Neelambari
Second day	Kannada	Shankarabharanam
Third day	Adhana	Kamboji
Fourth day	Poorvi Kalyani	Chakravakam
Fifth day	Saveri	Surutti
Sixth day	Begada	Ananda Bhairavi
Seventh day	Bhairavi	Yadukula Kamboji
Eighth day	Nattakkurinji	Shankarabharanam
Ninth day	Kamas	Kedaragaulam

The *Arat* ceremony falls on the tenth day with the procession to the Shanghumughom Beach for the holy immersion and other ceremonies. From the starting point of the *Siveli* inside the Temple, till the beach front is reached, a number of *Ragas* are utilised at the prescribed stages of the procession. In line of order, they read as follows:

1. Sreeragam
2. Simhala
3. Kamas
4. Bhairavi
5. Kamboji
6. Thodi
7. Shankarabharanam
8. Panduvarali

During the *Arat* ceremony, *Shankarabharanam* is played and thereafter *Kalyani*.

As the procession returns, strains of *Chakravaka Ragam* rise up in the air. Once the Devi Temple on the beach is crossed and till the Western Fort entrance is reached the *Ragamalika* of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal is played. When the Fort is entered *Ragas Dhanyasi* and *Kedaragalam* take over. As the night *Deeparadhana* comes to an end following the lowering of the flag signifying the conclusion of the festival, *Chakravakam* is heard again.



Another active art kept up by this Temple is the *Kathakali*. During the biannual festivals, *Kathakali* plays are enacted in the *Natakashala Mukhappu* for twenty days, lasting the whole night through. One characteristic is that a complete play and just not a few acts are presented as is done in many other temples. Costumes and other effects used exclusively for the performances in the Temple are stored in the Palace. A number of famous *Kathakali* plays had been written to be staged here and some works like Unnayi Warriar's *Nala Charitham Atta Katha* had their premiere appearance in this hall of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Many of the Maharajas and members of the Royal Family have made weighty contribution to *Kathakali* literature for the Temple festivals. A separate school of *Kathakali* by name *Kapplingadu* School or *Thekkan* (Southern) School of *Kathakali* took its birth in the portals of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple under the guiding hand of Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma (Dharma Raja), who was himself a great scholar in this field. That school continues to operate.

As mentioned previously, ninety-nine *Arangams* (art forms) thrived under the patronage of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Unfortunately the names of many are lost. From certain Temple records available with the State Archives fifty one have been identified and they took place either inside or outside the Temple during the festival period. Not all of them could claim artistic excellence as some were mainly for amusement or were physical acrobatics. It is not clear how many out of this long list were regularly practised in the Temple, maybe a handful as they were basically geared for increasing the importance and attraction of the festivals when crowds thronged there. One aspect is a certainty. These *Arangams* were a source of delight to the ordinary people and offered endless fascination to them.

A point of note is that most of the arts that are coming under survey were the birthright of different communities. There is enough proof that even centuries back various castes of people were involved with the Temple, even castes which did not fall within the orbit of the upper castes, through their participation in the festivals. Rigidity in untouchability must have somehow developed only later on.

Another feature is that arts which were exclusively performed in temples dedicated to forms of Godhead other than Vishnu were also recognized and patronised by this great Temple even during the days when religion at times adopted narrow boundaries to project its own chosen Deity.

The fifty one *Arangams* are being listed now with explanatory lines wherever possible.

1. *Agnisthambhana-vidya* (അഗ്നിസ്തംഭം വിദ്യ) – the skill by which fire is stilled. It is even now seen as a surviving art in Pondicherry, Karakkudi and in old South Travancore areas of present day Tamil Nadu.



2. *Annam-kettu* (അന്നം കെട്ട്) – display of large sized artificially decorated swan. This was performed by the Ezhava community and is still seen in its pure form in Sree Neelamperur Temple on the eastern bank of Kuttanad in Central Travancore.
3. *Ammana-attom* (അമ്മാന ആട്ടം) – jugglery performed by the Vela community from a place called Manjoor near Ettumanoor in Central Travancore. They would sing the *Mahabharatham* in Malayalam known as *Vela Bharatam* as they displayed their many feats.
4. *Alankara-vidvans* (അലങ്കാരവിദ്വാന്മാർ) – masters in the art of decoration.
5. *Andi-attom* (ആണ്ടിയാട്ടം) – folk dance of the Andi Pandaram caste originally hailing from places like Pazhani or Thiruchendoor in Tamil Nadu, settled in Thiruvananthapuram.
6. *Alippuram-thullal* (ആലിപ്പുറം തുള്ളൽ).
7. *Udukkum-pattum* (ഉടുക്കും പാട്ടും) – singing of Ayyappan songs and Bhagavathi songs accompanied by a percussion instrument termed *Udukku* by the Nair community.
8. *Udukku-kottu* (ഉടുക്കു കൊട്ട്) – playing on the *Udukku* by Nairs especially by Karakkaru Nairs of Malabar.
9. *Ottan-thullal* (ഓട്ടൻതുള്ളൽ) – song, quasi dance and narration by a single actor in semi *Kathakali* costume performed by Nairs.
10. *Kanakkambu-aivu* (കണക്കമ്പ് എയിവ്) – art of display of aim by throwing sticks.
11. *Kambadavu* (കമ്പടവ്) – defence with sticks.
12. *Karana-chattam* (കരണച്ചാട്ടം) – somersault.
13. *Kavirayanmar* (കവീരായന്മാർ) – assembly of poets for display of scholarship by upper castes.
14. *Kalakkoothu* (കാളക്കൂത്ത്) – local bull fight or competition of bulls.
15. *Kaliyil-adi* (കളിയിലടി) – mock fight (Arangam).
16. *Kiratam-attom* (കിരാത ആട്ടം) – enactment of the Kirathaarjuneyam episode of *Mahabharatam*.
17. *Kuchela-attom* (കുചേലനാട്ടം) – enactment of the story of Kuchela, the Brahmin.
18. *Kuntham-payattu* (കുന്തം പയറ്റ്) – spear fight.
19. *Kurali-vidya* (കുറളി വിദ്യ) – an Arangam



20. *Koodi-attom* (കൂടിയാട്ടം) – presented by the Chakyars and their women, the Nangyars, who play the female roles. They hail from the community of *Ambalavasies* who wear the holy thread or *Yajnopaveetham*. The stories are in Sanskrit, Malayalam and Prakrith languages and in many acts. The Chakyar is given unlimited licence to make fun of any one irrespective of status during the performance without fear of punishment.
21. *Krishnanattom* (കൃഷ്ണനാട്ടം) – performed by the specially trained Nairs from certain areas of Kozhicode and Palakkad, it was a dance form with emphasis on footwork wherein the stories of Sree Krishna were presented. Eight days were needed for a full performance. There exists a belief that this art form was restricted originally to the royal court of the Zamorin of Kozhicode<sup>15</sup> and later on to the premises of the Sree Krishna Swamy Temple in Guruvayoor but these records correct that misconception, as it was enacted in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple at Thiruvananthapuram also.
22. *Kaivistaram* (കൈവിസ്താരം) – magic by trick of hand.
23. *Garuda-vidya* (ഗരുഡവിദ്യ) – also known as *Garudan Parappu* where players dress up as Garuda with mask and wings and are suspended from a rope and are made to move to time. This skill is normally seen only in Bhagavathi Temples. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple's cosmopolitan outlook was ready to embrace and encourage talent of varied origins.
24. *Chakyar-koothu* (ചാക്യാർ കൂത്ത്) – performed by the section of Ambalavasi Chakyar clan which has the right to the *Yagnopaveetham*. As such pointing the finger at the audience is allowed. One-act plays mainly in Malayalam are performed in elongated poetry form. Social satire is seen.
25. *Cheppadi-vidya* (ചെപ്പടിവിദ്യ) – magic.
26. *Chemnavatham-attom* (ചെമ്മാവതം ആട്ടം) – a kind of folk-dance.
27. *Gnaninmel-dandippu* (ഞാണിമേൽ ദണ്ഡിപ്പ്) – dancing on tight rope.
28. *Thamburukkottu* (തമ്പുരു കൊട്ട്) – playing on the *thamburu*, a stringed musical instrument.
29. *Nattuvanmar* (നട്ടുവന്മാർ) – grand masters of the classical South Indian dance known as *Bharatha Natyam* who hailed from interior Tamil Nadu.

15. *Zamorin of Kozhikode (Calicut)* – Zamorin was the title given to the King of Calicut, Kerala was under the sway of the three big and powerful rulers – Travancore, Cochin and Calicut (Kozhikode). The famous Sree Krishna Temple of Guruvayoor came under the direct management of the Zamorin. Even today he enjoys rights and privileges there.



30. *Natakashala-vidvans* (നാടകശാല വിദ്വാന്മാർ) – scholars who gather in the performance hall of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. They could be local or from other places, belonging to the upper castes – Namboodiries, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Ambalavasies, Nairs etc.
31. *Nokku-vidya* (നോക്കുവിദ്യ) – optical concentration, perhaps including hypnotism and mesmerism.
32. *Palavaka-arangu* (പലവക അരങ്ങ്) – different art forms or one art performed in many ways.
33. *Pathakam* (പാഠകം) – enacted by the *Ambalavasies* belonging to their sub sect known as Nambiars who do not have the holy thread. As such they are forbidden to point a finger at the audience during the performance. They present *Puranic* narrations including matters of contemporary relevance in Sanskrit with Malayalam interpretations in a sing-song style typical of Kerala.
34. *Pavakkoothu* (പാവക്കൂത്ത്) – both Nairs of Palghat and Tamil Pillais (Pulavars as they are called) present this *Arangam*. *Kambaramayanam* in Malayalam and Tamil is staged with the use of leather puppets as shadow play behind a cloth screen.
35. *Mathrakol-kali* (മാത്രകോൽ കളി) – folk dance performed as a group dance originally by the cowherds of Gujarat who belonged to the Krishna cult. They dance to the rhythm of the two sticks one in either hand which they clap together or clap on their partner's sticks. Some sticks have a small bell attached to one end. There is a special significance to their artistic displays. One of the *Sthala Puranas* of this Temple states the influx of Gujarathies centuries back and to the Sree Krishna Idol they brought (which they claim to be the one in the Thiru Ampati shrine). These emigrants would have brought this dance form as well.
36. *Modi-vidya* (മോടി വിദ്യ) – fancy dress or costume display.
37. *Mohini-attom* (മോഹിനിയാട്ടം) – originally performed by the *Devadasies* or maidens of the temples, it is a languorous, slow moving dance style, typical of Kerala.
38. *Ramakatha-pattu* (രാമകഥപ്പാട്ട്) – Ayyappalli Ashan of the Fourteenth century wrote *Ramakatha-pattu* in the Malayalam of those days. He lived in Kovalam six hundred years ago in Thiruvananthapuram District and was a singer and performer in his own right, and came from the Nair community. He would sing accompanied by a peculiar stringed circular instrument known as *Chandravalayam* (ചന്ദ്രവളയം), which was kept in his family temple in Kovalam. Records of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy



Temple state that he used to perform in this Temple (Refer chapter *Legends and Folklore*).

39. *Raman-attom* (രാമനാട്ടം) – written in Malayalam by Kottarakkara Thampuran, Veera Kerala Varma of *Peraka Thavazhi*. The *Ramayanam* is presented in pristine purity in eight days.
40. *Rudra-veena* (രുദ്രവീണ) – a special type of *Veena* (long stringed musical instrument famous by its association with Goddess Saraswathi) which is played by passing a smooth stone under varying pressures over the strings. Its construction also varies from the orthodox *Veena*.
41. *Vattathil-chattom* (വട്ടത്തിൽ ചാട്ടം) – circular acrobatics.
42. *Valum-parichayum dandippu* (വാളും പരിചയും ദണ്ഡിപ്പ്) – sword and shield art of defence, mainly by Nairs.
43. *Valerumkalavidya* (വാളേറുംകലാവിദ്യ) – sword throwing.
44. *Valvizhungividya* (വാൾ വിഴുങ്ങിവിദ്യ) – sword swallowing trick.
45. *Venguchari-kolam* (വെങ്കുച്ചാരികോലം) – performed by the Kanian community of Travancore. It is a kind of ritual dance representing celestial characters in stylised costumes, head gear and mask depending heavily on the local materials for their creation. Much pleased with their talents, the then king is seen to have awarded them land free of taxes.
46. *Vettum-thadayum* (വെട്ടും തടയും) – martial art of offence and defence.
47. *Velan-thullal* (വേലൻതുള്ളൽ) – this originated under the patronage of Devanarayanan, the Namboodiri King of Ambalappuzha and was performed by the Velan community. Later it was brought into Thiruvananthapuram following the annexation of that area.
48. *Sasthrakali* (ശാസ്ത്രകളി) – this is by the Namboodiries who rank a little lower in the social ladder of their own community. It is a social satire enacted during special functions. Also known as *Yathra Kali* (യാത്രകളി), the language used is a mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit. The family Deity of this community is Sastha, which is unusual among them. Records of the *Mathilakam* reveal the remuneration paid to them by the Temple for their performance.
49. *Hanuman-vidya* (ഹनुമാൻ വിദ്യ) – masked representation of Hanuman. There are two types of masks used, one in green and one in red signifying the two *Gunas* of *Satvam* and *Rajas* respectively. A type of folk dance with prominence given to the steps executed. The words are in Malayalam. With the mask on, the performer is believed to gain certain powers and gives blessings especially to little ones. He also becomes an oracle at times.



50. *Sadhana-vidya* (സാധന വിദ്യ) – meditative powers. As per oral tradition, these persons could sit or recline on the surface of water drawing upon *Yogic* powers. They are said to have displayed this feat of *Hata Yogam* in the *Padma Teertham*.

51. *Kathakali* (കഥകളി) – dance drama with elaborate hand and facial movements and complicated costumes and make-up. The presentation of this dance drama is accompanied by certain musical instruments and two vocalists who sing the stories. These *Kathakali* songs rate high in scholarly expression, language and literature.

Four other *Arangams* which have not featured in the above mentioned record are being added here, bringing the number to a total of fifty five.

52. *Poikkal-Kuthira-attom* – (പൊയ്ക്കാൽ കുതിര ആട്ടം) usually performed by men from Tamil Nadu. A folk dance where the performers are on stilts dressed in such a way as to give the appearance of riding a horse. Model of a horse is made and attached to the waist. A crude type of dance with swaying movements is performed, accompanied by instrumental music. It is a surviving art.

53. *Kuthirakkettu* (കുതിരക്കെട്ട്) – huge sized artificial horses, highly decorated and manually carried. These are normally associated with festivals of the Goddesses and continues to be very common in Central Travancore regions.

54. *Vela-kali* (വേല കളി) – acted out by the Nairs (Panickers) of certain families in Ambalappuzha. A representation of the Kurukshetra War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas is enacted at the foot of the eastern flight of steps of the Temple. This takes place once a year during the *Painkuni* festival when the massive wooden figures of the five Pandava brothers, Dharmaputrar, the eldest in sitting posture and all the others at spaced distances stand facing the front entrance from the road. The hundred Kaurava brothers armed with swords and shields, accompanied by martial music march through the roads of the Fort, sporting a special attire to assemble at the steps. A sort of war dance is played out with the leaders performing separately and the majority together. It ends in the Kauravas defeat by the Pandavas and they flee the place in disorder. Each day after the noon *Siveli* of this festival, *Vela Kali* used to take place as a regular feature, attracting crowds. Following financial difficulties it had to be discontinued though the Pandavas are still erected. Serious thought is being bestowed upon how to revive it.

55. *Harikathakalakshepam* (ഹരികഥാകലാക്ഷേപം) – though having its origin in Maharashtra and popular in Thanjavoor in Tamil Nadu much earlier,



this art form found its way into Kerala in the time of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, who first introduced it here. Meru Goswamy Bhagavathar was the pioneer exponent of the same. As the name suggests, the theme was predominantly Vaishnavite but in later years with its entry into this cultfree land, stories of other divinities were also incorporated. With minimum usage of prose, which was in local language, the rest of the rendering was in classical music without too much elaboration, leaning heavily on Sanskrit as the medium.

Much earlier in the past, music concerts had a platform of appreciation in the Temple. Somewhere along the line, this aspect faded away. In the time of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma some years ago a revival took place partially. The annual birthday celebrations of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma conducted under the banner of All India Radio, Thiruvananthapuram, start with the rendering of devotional songs of the Maharaja, vocally or on the *Veena* by many eminent musicians, in the *Natakashala Mukhappu* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The Sree Swathi Thirunal Sangeetha Sabha has artists performing here for half a day on instruments and vocally in homage to the revered memory of Sree Chithira Thirunal on the day of his demise. World famous personalities like Smt. M.S. Subhalakshmi have sung before the Deity. Submission of artistic talents before the Deity are seen at times.

Decorations, especially with flowers and lighted lamps, form a system of art in themselves. (They tend to vary according to the capacity and taste of the officers as well as the priests involved. They have presently reached a fine degree of merit).

## Static Arts

### Murals

Architecture, sculpture and painting all became component parts of static art. Since the first two have already been dealt with exhaustively in the earlier section of this chapter, they do not invite repetition. Even the Idols fashioned out of *Katu-Sarkara*, including the magnificent main reclining *Sree Anantasayana Moorthy*, are from the artistic point of view, superb. Iconography as an art thus flourishes in this Temple. One aspect which remains to be presented is the collection of mural paintings available. They are mainly seen on the inner walls of the *Cheruchuttu* near the main *Sreekovil*, and around the shrine of Sree Narasimha Swamy. They also appear all around the external walls of the sanctum on the south, west and north portions up to the outer wall of the Sree Vishwakshenan's shrine, as a single major panel on the west inner side of the *Nalambalam*, all around the shrine of Sree Krishna Swamy and on the inner wall of the shrine of Sree *Kshetrapalan*. The main extensive murals encircling the outer walls of the sanctum adhere to the principle of the *Pancha-*



*malas* or five garlands accepted in temple painting. They are *Mriga-mala* (animal garland), *Pakshi-mala* (bird garland), *Vana-mala* (forest garland), *Bhoota-mala* (garland of extra-terrestrial beings including demons) and *Chitra-mala*, which covers all sorts of scenes depicting the varied complexity of activities that go into the creation of life and living in its lights and shades. As such some paintings in this last mentioned category have an erotic slant.

The sixteenth century text in Kerala temple architecture, *Silparetnam* by Srikumaran, dwells upon the importance of painting murals on either side of the walls of the sanctum. The subjects were usually stories or dramatic episodes from the *Puranas* and epics. *Dhyanaslokas* were also relied upon for themes. Rather than being mere artistic decorations, the murals served another nobler purpose of evoking *Bhakti* (devotion) to be more precise, one of the aspects of the nine types of *Bhakti-Smaranam* (remembrance) – in the mind of the devotee.

The secret of the durability of these paintings lies in the fact that these were drawn using natural pigments obtained from natural stones and juices of plants. Such dyes penetrate deep into the layers of the surface painted, which had initially been painstakingly treated with lime, tender coconut water and natural resins. The brushes are specially fabricated from grass and treated in milk for a specified duration.

Most of the murals of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple were originally executed in the time of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma in the Seventeen Hundreds. It appears that the famous murals of the Sree Padmanabhapuram Palace as well as those at the Neyyattinkara Sree Krishna Swamy Temple (with its close associations with this King) were also done during this period.

According to R.V. Poduval's evaluation in his book *Arts and Crafts of Kerala*, "*The culmination of achievement in the pictorial art of Travancore can be seen on the walls of the central shrine of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.*"

Some of the original paintings which can still be perceived on the upper reaches of the walls of the sanctum in their pristine splendour are much lauded for their excellence. They contain the *Bhagavatham*, *Ramayanam* and the *Mahabharatham* series of paintings. Probably these works commenced in the year 904 ME/1729 AD and finished in 908 ME/1733 AD.

The old masterpieces on the lower walls have however been re-touched or re-done to restore them from the ravages of weather especially rain. Along with these, the paintings around the shrines of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy of Thiru Ampati were redone by the late Karumpambathu Achuthan Nair, Mammiyoor Krishnankutty Nair and his disciples. The Kshetrapalan shrine has murals which retain their ancient character dating to Marthanda Varma or Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi.



During the time of Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi, some paintings, especially the ones in the Sastha shrine and the big *Anantasayanam* on the western wall as well as in the sanctum area, were done or redone by a famous Brahmin painter living in Karamana village by name Chalayil Kalahasti. The Temple records substantiate this. As and when required their repairs have been subsequently attended to. During the period of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma, a part renovation was carried out. Currently a team of artists from the well known Mammiyoor school of mural painting in Guruvayoor, who are disciples of the famous master of this art, Sree Mammiyoor Krishnankutty Nair, are working on the murals under the supervision of Prof. M.G. Sasibhooshan, himself an evaluator of acknowledged expertise.<sup>16</sup>

According to the circumambulation route the recording of the paintings commences with the outer walls of the Sree Narasimha shrine. They are presented as Sudarsana Moorthy, Venugopala Krishna, Devi as Mahagayathri, Siva Tandavam (cosmic dance of Siva) Siva-Parvathi, Bhadra Kali, Sree Vettakkorumakan (a rare concept of divinity) and the fierce *Aghora* form of Siva and Kiratarjuneya (where Lord Siva as hunter tests Arjuna before bestowing on him the sacred weapon).

On entering the *Cheruchuttu* which contains the *Sreekovil* of the Perumal, certain murals are on display. Starting from the side nearest to the holy feet of the Lord the first mural as we face the sanctum to the right is the *Nabhijanma*<sup>17</sup> form of Brahma, with a sage to the right, two of the Sanakadi sages below and four *Ashtayudha Purushas* or Devas (divinities) of four out of the eight weapons depicted above. The four represented on this side are the Sword, Shield, Arrow and Bow. A sitting Bhoomi Devi is seen close by. In the next section on the same side are sages, Vyaghrapada Muni, below with beard and matted hair, Pathanjali and, as the last picture on this side, the standing figure of Garuda with folded hands.

From the crown of the Lord, to the left, the standing form of Siva with all identification marks, two of the Sanakadi sages as naked children with saints to their left and, last of all, Lakshmi Devi in a sitting posture are presented. On the upper portion the remaining four *Ayudha Purushas* are painted. They are the Conch, Disc, Mace and the Lotus, all specifically relating to Vishnu. At an even greater elevation, an *Anantasayanam* is well executed. It is seen in its original form. In the inset behind the cradle, the space is fully filled up with a painting of baby Krishna on the lap of His foster mother Yasoda with His foster father Nandagopan seated close at hand. The celestials are shown showering

16. The original murals bear strong resemblance to those of Thiruvattar and Panayannarkavu (near Thiruvalla) but differ from the Padmanabhapuram murals.

17. Brahma taking birth in the lotus from the Nabhi (navel) of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.



lotus petals on the trio. Many other details are also incorporated.<sup>18</sup> In the old records of the Temple the paintings inside the sanctum are mentioned. But today no trace of the same exists.

The profusion of paintings on the three outer walls of the sanctum are being identified and listed here as they are many in number. Certain murals of exceptional quality are being dealt with separately after the general survey is completed.

These murals follow the principle of the *Pancha-mala* (five garlands). The south side offers itself first for inspection. Generally, paintings which lean to the *Tamasic* or are of a less elevated nature are presented on this side of the Temple. At the same time all these murals cannot be judged as per that yardstick as here certain distinct deviations are seen. Brahmani (Upper Panel or U.P.) and Lakshmi (Lower Panel or L.P.) Thripurasundari (U.P.) and Mohini (L.P.), Siva Tandavam (U.P.) and Lord Murugan (L.P.) Annapoorneswari (Front panel) and Nandikeswaran or Siva riding on Nandi the Bull, (Front Panel) Saraswathi (U.P.) and Thripurasundari (U.P.). Mahalakshmi (Middle Panel), Parthasarathi and Dwarapalakan (L.P.) and Vishnu in sitting posture (U.P.) come as one section. Bala Saraswathi (Middle Panel), Vanabhojanam, Vamanan, Vishnu, Chathurakesari Gopala, Balabhadran and Balakrishna, Aswaroodha, Parvathi, Vasya Ganapathy and Dekshinamoorthy stand in array. Saraswathi features in the middle with Vishnu in the lower section. Then are seen the murals of Pancha Maha Durga, Ganapathy, Hayagreeva and Balakrishna. Krishna and Vasudeva appear on the lower panel, so also Nandagopan with his daughter. Vettakkorumakan repeats again as a middle panel. Another painting in this area depicts the ferocity of *Sree Narasimha Avatharam* as the Lord throws Hiranyakasipu across His knees and exterminates him.

The western side lays emphasis on the *Rajasic* characteristics. An important mural is that of the Yakshi and more details of the same are being incorporated at a later stage of this chapter. Sastha is seen on a hunt. He is hunting not wild beasts but the jungle which crowds the mind of man. A number of murals depicting the epic story of Sree Rama are portrayed like Rama in meditation, Rama praying to propitiate Siva, Sita under the Ashoka tree, Sita travelling in the *Pushpaka Vimanam*, demons, Kumbhakarnan, the Rama - Ravana war, Rama with the sages and so on. The *Yaga* (Vedic ritualistic sacrifice) at Nikumbhila is presented. The battle between Lakshmana and Indrajit, Hanuman's return with the life-saving medicinal plant, Sita and the monkey hordes are picturised. Ravana in the lower panel, Veera Rama in the middle one and the Devas (celestials) in the upper section are arranged in the ascending scale. The

18. In the work titled '*Bala Marthanda Vijayam*' of Dharma Raja's period, this painting finds specific mention.



*Ramayanam* theme continues to be further repeated and Sree Rama stringing the bow, Rama, Sita, Hanuman and the war between Sugreeva and Ravana are portrayed.

The northern sides lays stress on the *Satvic* type murals. Vamanan, *Thrivikrama Avatharam*,<sup>19</sup> Vishnu with Lakshmi Devi, Radha - Madhavam, an upper panel of the Lakshmi Swayamvara which is somewhat uncommon and Dwarapalakas array themselves on this wall. On three lower sections Radha and Krishna, Siva and Dakshinamoorthy, and Akhora Siva on the upper portion are shown. Bhoomi Devi and Thripurasundari come next. Extremely rare is the mural of Saluveswaran, the Siva Bhootam and is seen almost nowhere else. Gajendra-moksham, Siva as Ardhanareeswaran, Swayamvara Parvathi, Rajarajeswari and the same Goddess in the Kadamba forest are depicted.

A very big *Anantasayanam* mural is executed on the western wall of the *Nalambalam*. Records states that it was the master artist Chalayil Kalahasti who was originally responsible for it.

The murals around the Thiru Ampati shrine with a few exceptions relate exclusively to Krishna and to His babyhood and boyhood. The mural of Anantasayana Vishnu, standing Vishnu, Vishnu and of Krishna as Parthasarathi are the only ones featuring the scenes outside the orbit of Sree Krishna's tender years.

In rotation Siva, Brahma, Vishnu seated on Ananta, a standing Vishnu, Devaki, Kamsa, *Krishna Avatharam* (incarnation of Lord Krishna) and Vasudeva crossing the River Kalindi are seen. Following the sequence of events come *Poothana-moksham*, *Sree Krishnaleelas* (frolics of the Lord), *Vanabhojanam* (picnic in the forest with His playmates, the Gopa boys), *Sakatasura Nigraham* (slaying of the demon Sakatasura), killing of the demon Baka disguised as a bird etc. rank next. *Parthasarathi* is also painted. Krishna, the naughty child, being tied with a rope to the *Ural*<sup>20</sup> or *Damodaraleela*, killing of the elephant *Kuvalayapedam*, *Kaliyamardanam*, Bala Krishna holding up the mount *Govardhana* in the deluge and the *Dwarapalikas* are also presented.

The four paintings on the inner walls of the Kshetrapala's shrine are lauded for their quality workmanship. They are Vishwakshenan, Ganapathy, Venugopala Krishna and Sree Krishnaleela.

Highly rated works among the murals encircling the sanctum come in for special mention. The fairly big representation of the Yakshi on the southern portion of the western wall merits particular attention. As a rule the Yakshi is quite popular with the mural painters of Kerala. She is portrayed as the

19. *Thrivikrama Avataram* – Vamanan in the process of lowering Mahabali.

20. *Ural* – Granite pounder.



embodiment of celestial enchantment and is also a quick dispenser of boons if propitiated in the right way. Usually this beautiful sylph of the woods is presented as standing alone underneath an arecanut palm, but the Yakshi in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is seen as standing under an ordinary palm. It is not clear if the deviation was intentional or if the re-painter's brush had erroneously altered the accepted nature of the tree. This Yakshi is attended by a *Dasi* (female attendant) and her left hand holds a hand mirror and she is seen applying *Sindooram* (vermilion) on her forehead. The mirror is ornately framed and rectangular in shape, reminiscent of the Belgium mirrors that were in vogue in the Travancore Palaces during the eighteenth century. (a copy of this painting is exhibited at the Sree Chithira Art Gallery in Thiruvananthapuram ) There is a true narration connecting the renovation of this particular painting which has been included in the chapter *Legends and Folklore*.

The two paintings of Sashta at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are remarkable. They are seen on the southern wall which is the *Kanni-moola*. One picturises young Sashta as a hunter on horseback. This is a common presentation and its speciality rests in its symbolism. The forest symbolises the human mind and Sashta's venture to overpower the wild beasts is an overt reminder to the devotees to check their passions and desires which are the untamed beasts. The other Sashta painting on the western wall is a rare one representing a *Dhyana Mantram* (invocative descriptive incantation). The bearded figure of the Lord looks majestic and purposeful as He is seated astride an elephant. This picture of Sashta is reputed to bring all prosperity to those who invoke the Deity through this particular incantation.

Goddess Rajarajeswari is resplendent with the traditional adornments of a beautiful woman and appears on the southern wall. Her celestial nature is revealed by the third eye, the crescent moon, in Her tresses and the lotus bloom in her right hand. Moreover she is worshipped by Brahma and other godly beings and several venerable sages. (The Sree Chithra Art Gallery has a copy of this painting as well).

The southern wall of the main shrine also has a small but very impressive painting of the Goddess of Learning, Saraswathi Devi. She is exceedingly fair of complexion and is seen seated on a white lotus wearing a crescent moon in Her hair. She holds in Her hands a palm leaf *Grantha* and an *Ezhuthani*. (sharp needle-like instrument used for writing or inscribing on the cadjan leaves).

Yet another work of significance is displayed on the southern wall close to Goddess Saraswathi, that is Aswaroodha Devi, the Goddess on horse back. She is Parvathi and according to Hindu mythology if She is worshipped as such with devotion by young men they will be blessed with good wives. Holding the bridle in one hand and a small golden staff in the other, She is of the colour of the beautiful red lotus.



Sita is seen on the western wall in a mural of depth and beauty. She is seated under a tree and appears as an epitome of grief and silent suffering.

The *Anantasayanam* mirroring the *Moola Vighram* (main Idol) of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple can claim the distinction of being one of the biggest mural panels of Kerala. It reminds one of the large fresco of *Gajendra-moksham* at Krishnapuram Palace and the *Pradoshanritham* mural of Ettumanoor Temple. It is painted on the inner side of the western *Nalambalam*.

Even in the previous pages only a fairly detailed chronicling of the murals has been done, dwelling on all the major paintings and outstanding ones from the view point of style, theme, artistry and so on. Omissions can perhaps be noticed in the range of the less significant ones.

In conclusion, certain special features of the murals at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are being touched upon. The oldest and perhaps the most beautiful paintings here are those that can be found on the upper most reaches of the sanctum. Due to their location at such elevation they cannot be viewed with ease by anyone experts including Prof. M.G. Sasibhooshan have independently identified them. Accordingly they depict scenes from the *Bhagavatham*, *Mahabharatham* and the *Ramayanam*. Various events like the marriage of Devaki and Vasudeva and many instances which were part of the childhood of Lord Krishna are picturised. The *Ramayanam* series covers the whole epic from Sree Rama's birth to His coronation. These two extensive panels are obviously drawn by two different artists as each of them offers a distinct stylistic variation. The effortless fusion of colour and line in the *Bhagavatham* paintings invites admiration. Individual figures are incorporated.

From the iconographical viewpoint the paintings of this great Temple stand unique and rare depictions of Gods and Goddesses are found here. The Pancha Maha Durga and the *Changala* or Vasya Ganapathy who holds a gold chain in His hands (both on the southern sanctum wall) are examples in point and, to the best of this writer's knowledge can be seen nowhere else in Kerala; so too the Saluveswaran seen on the western sanctum wall. These paintings act as a tribute to the masters of this art form and serve to enhance the dimensions of this already radiant seat of Divinity.



# 11

## GUARDIANS OF TEMPLE TRADITIONS

### The Tantries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads of Irinjalakkuta

In a temple the position of the Tantri is hereditary and of paramount importance. In religious matters he is the supreme deciding authority and his verdict is final.

The history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is hoary with great age. It is only natural that the *Tantries* of this Temple also trace their descent long back in the calendar of time.

Among the Tantri families of repute in Kerala, the Namboodiripads of *Tarananalloor Illom* (house) stand in the forefront possessing a tradition of *Tantram* which is centuries old. After the re-creation of Kerala by Sree Parasurama,<sup>1</sup> the sixth incarnation of Maha Vishnu, He constructed many a temple all over the land and consecrated idols as per the prescribed norms. For the sake of conducting the daily worship in these temples and also for performing consecration ceremonies and *Tantric* requirements in temples of the future, Parasurama decided to select competent *Tantries* from the Namboodiri houses of the land.

Parasurama instructed a Brahmin with the radiance of a *Yogi* standing on the opposite bank of the River Kaveri to cross over to his side. Drawing on the spiritual resources within himself that great Brahmin walked over the waters with ease and reached Parasurama. Pleased by this display of *Yogic* powers, Bhargavarama<sup>2</sup> conferred on him the title of distinction of *Tarananalloor*, one

1. Kerala had existed in the time of Vamana Avatharam, the fifth incarnation of Maha Vishnu, when Mahabali ruled the land. Puranas narrate his story and the granting of his request by Vamanan to visit the land he loved once a year. This land mass must have been claimed by the sea at some point of time. In the sixth incarnation of Maha Vishnu as Parasurama the lush land of Kerala was retrieved by Him from the waters.
2. Another name of Sree Parasurama.



who crossed (*Taranom*) from one place (*Ooru*) to another, as the family name. He also bestowed on this Brahmin the permission to conduct *Tantram*. Not satisfied with this, Parasurama gifted to him a residence in the village of Samgamesha Puri (today's Irinjalakkuta in Thrissur District, Kerala State) as well as an invaluable *Grantha* or cadjan leaf manuscript on *Tantram* famous as the *Anustana Grantham* or *Parasurama Padhathi*. The *Tantram* performed by these Namboodiripads is based on this sacred system. The procedure laid down here is practised only by the Tarananalloor Tantries or their followers. They officiate in six out of the ten known Vishnu temples which are all in Kerala, where the system known as *Padhathi Sampradayam* is adopted. Such temples identified as *Padhathi Kshetras* are not functional anywhere else in the World. The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple ranks as the foremost and biggest among them all. In just six out of ten temples of Vishnu in Kerala including the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple where they officiate, this system known as *Padhathi Sampradayam* is adopted.

One more treasured gift received from Lord Parasurama by this Tantri of *Tarananalloor Illom* was a *Kaivatta* or a vessel used for a special rite known as *Sreebhootabeli*. Today's *Tarananalloor Tantries* of Irinjalakkuta are the descendants of that great Tantri who was fortunate enough to receive the direct blessings of Sree Parasurama.

The above account is not considered in the light of a legend but accepted as a historical fact. *Kerala Mahatmyam* is a weighty work in verse, which contains the quintessence of the *Brahmanda Puranam*. In chapter twenty titled *Tantra Pradanom* (Bestowing of *Tantram*), this story is described in detail.

The *Tantra Samuchayam* is the popularly accepted volume on *Tantram* and is followed by the majority of Tantries in Kerala. In this work the chapters entitled *Kerala Desam* and *Tantram* (The land of Kerala and *Tantram*) and *Tantra Acharyas* (Masters of *Tantram*) clarify and accept the *Tantric* system of the Tarananalloor tradition. It is also seen specified in this work that twelve disciples were given to the Tarananalloors to perform rituals etc.

In the book *Kshetra Chaitanya Rahasyam* by Madhavji it is stated that Parasurama entrusted the responsibility of *Tantram* to twelve Namboodiri families chosen by Him, starting with Tarananalloor. The names of the remaining eleven houses are not separately mentioned here.

The great scholar Pachu Moothathu of Vaikkom in his volume *Kerala Visesa Niyamom*, chapter 10 writes thus. "*Tarananalloor Namboodiripad who assumed the responsibility of Tantram as per Parasurama's directives, is the most famed in this field.*" In chapter One, it states that Tarananalloor consecrated the idols of Ayyappa, Bhadra Kali, Vettakkorumakan, Durga, Subramonya etc. as well as those of Maha Vishnu and Paramasiva.

These Namboodiripads are deemed as experts in *Shad Karmas* as well. They rank high in the hierarchy of their community due to their superiority of status and knowledge of spiritual disciplines.



History reveals the participation of these Tantries as the chief officiating priests in all great religious ceremonies of the royalty conducted in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple such as *Hiranyagarbham* and *Thulapurusha Danam* from the time of King Veera Kerala Varma in 311 AD (Kali year 3412) when he ruled over a good part of Kerala.<sup>3</sup> This Tantri family held the position of chief priests of the Royal House. From that time onwards they had this designation for a very long time, possibly till they became the formally accepted *Tantries* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. After that change in status they are seen to have played a pivotal role in the conduct of the elaborate *Murajapam* festival of this Temple. In the nomination of the *Pushpanjali Swamiyar* from the monastic orders to the Temple too, their opinion is essential.

There are many other records available in the Temple scrolls in which their names repeatedly appear highlighting the ancient connection of these Tantries with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Throne of Venad. A few are cited below.

A copper plate in the hermitage attached to the Sree Mitranandapuram Temple closely linked to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple dated 343 ME/1168 AD is available.<sup>4</sup> This year fell during the reign of King Veera Adithya Varma. It tells of the number of gifts offered to the Sree Mithranandapuram Temple and the consecration of a Sree Krishna idol within its premises. One of the witnesses mentioned on the plate is Kesavan Damodaran of Tarananalloor Illom. Though perhaps not Tantries of those two Temples at that time (a position that became theirs with certainty later on and which they continue to hold as of date), it is clear that the family held an important place in Temple affairs even then. If not, a member of that *Illom* situated far away from Thiruvananthapuram would not have been chosen as a witness in the days when travelling was cumbersome and time-consuming.

The Suchindrom Inscription of 413 ME/1238 AD of Ravi Kerala Varma, records the appointment of Malayalee Namboodiries in the Sree Suchindrom Temple as Tantries for the first time. It is an established fact that the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads had the right of *Tantram* there from a long time ago.

There is a very important scroll – *Churuna* - 2602, *Ola* 192 of the *Mathilakam* Records 680 ME/1505 AD which establishes the successive appointment of Tarananalloor *Illom* as Tantries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. This decree was issued by the then ruler, King Iravi Iravi Varma, following the demise of Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Iswaran. Sanction was accorded to Netumpalli Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Padmanabhan to take over office.

3. *Mathilakam Records – Records of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.*

4. *Thiruvithamcoor Charitram* (P. 49).



On 17.7.743 ME/1568 AD the *Mathilakam* Records register the firm and final consent obtained from the *Ettara Yogam* or council by King Veera Marthanda Varma for the continued appointment of the Tarananalloor Namboodiripads as the hereditary Tantries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

Their presence for all special and significant rituals is illustrated by yet another *Churuna*, included here as an example. On the 4th of *Ani* 795 ME/ 1st of June 1620 AD, Thursday, a *Kalasam* (purificatory ceremony) for Sree Padmanabha Perumal was conducted by Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Padmanabhan. In the time of King Unni Kerala Varma, Thrippappoor Mooppan, the *Mulayital* ceremony, (planting of grains connected with the bi-annual festivals) was performed by Tarananalloor Namboodiripad.

There is ample evidence of the authority exerted by the Tantries over the matters relating to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Throne of Travancore. For instance in vital decisions regarding the adoption of a male member into the Travancore Royal family in the absence of heirs to continue the line, in 849 ME/1674 AD during the reign of the Queen Umayamma Rani, the important role played by the Tarananalloor Tantries is on record. It was also during this period that a significant turn of events is seen in the Tarananalloor *Illom* as well. The *Illom* was made up of four branches or *Thavazhies* with the right of *Tantram* resting with the eldest male member of all the four branches which went under the branch names of *Veluthedathu*, *Thekkiniyathu*, *Kidangacherry* and *Nedumpilli*. During Umayamma Rani's rule, the right of *Tantram* in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple became restricted to the *Nedumpilli* branch alone. It continues uninterrupted to this day, despite certain passing clouds.

During the periods of construction of this great Temple and even at the ominous times when *Pujas* were suspended and the Temple remained closed, such steps were adopted only in consultation with the Tantries. This too is supported by proof in writing.

A vital event is being presented here. In the month of *Mithunam* (June/ July), on the ninth day of the Malayalam year 914 ME/1739 AD, the Tantri of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, Tarananalloor Padmanabhan Parameswaran, conducted the consecration of the present *Moola Vighram* (main Idol) in its existing sanctum.

The Temple registers underline the inevitability of the Tantries for the special and important religious rituals which take place over and above the routine rites and daily worship and which are by custom discharged only by them. While they can function as substitutes for the chief priests or Periya Nambi and Panchagavyathu Nambi in the performance of duties for a period of time, the Tantries in turn cannot be replaced by them. During the instances when pollution caused by birth or death in the Tantri's family prevented them from



attending to their duties in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the ceremonies including the festivals of this Temple are seen to have been delayed to such a date when it became possible for the Tantries to participate. Such pollutions have occurred at times in the midst of the *Utsavas* (festivals) which had then to remain suspended in the middle till the period of pollution for the Tantri was over. Thereafter the festival was resumed and brought to completion. The *Painkuni Utsavam* of 940 ME/1765 AD, during Dharmaraja's time, *Alpashi Utsavas* of 1088 ME/1862 AD and 1169 ME/1994 AD during the times of Sree Ayillyom Thirunal and Sree Uthradom Thirunal respectively, are proof in point when the former had to be suspended midway and the latter postponed, due to death pollution. This clearly illustrates that no substitution was possible in any manner for them.

There is a custom existing in this family that before the male members leave the *Illom* on a religious mission, they obtain the blessings of the senior lady members of the family. This started with the incident of a young Namboodiripad, still in his early teens, who faced the necessity to officiate on behalf of the senior members of the family at a festival in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, in their absence. He left, *Grantha* in hand, after obtaining his mother's blessings which acted as an armour for him in times of trial (Refer chapter *Legends and Folklore*).

The divinity and prosperity of any temple is believed to be dependent upon the spiritual powers of its Tantri. When a temple prospers, the community around it also flourishes. Many are the qualities and qualifications a Tantri should possess to enable him to discharge his duties in the manner expected of him. As such it is only natural that the spiritual charges that come as a legacy from their forefathers, the great patriarchs, is passed on to the successive Tantries also. The Tarananalloor Tantries prove this aspect excellently well.

The grand masters of Kerala *Tantram* are bifurcated into two sections – as those who practise *Tantram*, the *Karmies* and as those who expound its theory by writing about it. The Tarananalloor Tantries come in the first category wherein they are held in great esteem.

It is indeed an undoubted blessing that while the price of progress is often paid with the sacrifice of tradition, the Tantries of the great *Tarananalloor Illom* have not compromised their spiritual inheritance in the name of modernity. From the seniormost member of the family,<sup>5</sup> the eighty five year old Tarananalloor Padmanabharu Padmanabharu Namboodiripad, to the youngest child, they all adhere to their rich tradition and continue to assimilate, train and practise their holy birthright of *Tantram*. With the blessings of the Omnipotent Power in whose service they stand dedicated, their age-old bonds with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple continue to remain inviolate.

5. *This grandsire of the Illom has passed away since then.*



## 12

## WORSHIP OF THE CELESTIAL

## Rites, Rituals, Pujas, Festivals

The resonance of mysticism and spirituality, at times soft as the gentle murmur of ancient incantations, at times vibrant as the songs of the soul in many-pronged projections, traverse the hour glass of time, untouched by the upheavals of change, as the sacred worship of the *Akhilandakotibrahmandanayakan*, Sree Padmanabha Swamy in His Temple of Syanandoora.

Before delving into the subject matter, a modest sketch of the frame-work on which this worship rests does not appear inappropriate. Even prior to the *Thrippati Danam* of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, it was an established fact that the Temple and the Throne could not be compartmentalised; they moved ahead to meet destiny as one single flow of power. As such, the rites and rituals of the Temple were always elaborate. With the passage of time and specifically with the God becoming the absolute Ruler of Travancore, the already extensive existing codes of religious conduct gained greater complexity, with many of them assuming the nature of what is more normal in a royal court. The staggering free-feeding seen from Marthanda Varma's time is proof to the point. The system termed *Naradeeyam*, according to which everything is conducted on a superlative scale in comparison with other temples, is applicable here along with an in-depth infusion of *Rajasam* or royalty. For example it is said that half the quantum of offerings made to Sree Padmanabha Swamy is seen in Thiruvattar Sree Adi Kesava Perumal Temple (so closely affiliated to this Temple) and a quarter in the Sree Sreevallabha Temple in Thiruvalla illustrating this aspect (all three come within the 108 great Vishnu Temples of India) as identified by the Alvars. Sree Padmanabha Swamy is the Supreme Deity and He is also the Absolute Monarch, the mighty *Perumal*. As such, many attributes of sovereignty automatically vest in Him in concept and practical application.



## The Pushpanjali Swamiyar

The institution of the Pushpanjali Swamiyar is hoary with age. A glance at its evolution is most revealing and rewarding as such it is being briefly attempted. Apart from the four famed *Swamiyar Madhoms* of Sringeri, Puri, Badari and Dwaraka, Sree Adi Sankaraacharya, revered spiritual preceptor of the eight century, founded four more *Madhoms* answering to the names *Tekke* (south), *Vadakke* (north) *Naduvil* (central) and *Edayil* (in between) *Madhoms* which were all centered in his home town Thrissur in Kerala. The *Thekke Madhom* was entrusted to the tradition (*Parampara*) of Padmapada and *Naduvil Madhom* to that of Sureswaraacharya, both of whom were the *Acharya's* foremost disciples. The other two hermitages also functioned under Sree Sankara's own pupils Hasthamalaka and Tothakacharya. In a later year, mainly due to political undercurrents initiated and fostered by the *Zamorin* of Calicut, the *Edayil Madhom* got shifted to a place called Thavanoor close to Thrikkaikkotta. With the passage of time *Vadakke Madhom's* fortunes took a turn for the worse and it came to be faced with the dismaying situation of having no renunciates as followers. Consequently it changed hands and came under the senior Swamiyar (*Mooppil Swamiyar*) Changiliyoodu Vadhyam, to become the *Brahmaswa Madhom* which continues to be located in Thrissur. The role of these *Madhoms* in the establishment and preservation of temples in Kerala and in propounding to the disturbed mind of man the philosophy of amalgamation of different systems of Godly worship which projected the oneness of divinity, were of paramount significance. As such we find that *Pushpanjali* performed by the Swamiyar who was always a renunciate of Namboodiri origin became customary in many great temples of Travancore like Kanyakumari, Thiruvattar, Thiruvananthapuram, Trippuliyoor, Thiruvalla, Thiruvappu and so on with their participation varying from daily to annual, though the former was more common. The presence of a *Kshetra Sanyasi* within a temple offering flower worship was deemed to contribute to enhancing the sanctity of that temple and the prosperity of the land and the folk of that area. However, due to many factors, daily *Pushpanjali* by a Swamiyar has now become a rarity and seems to be functional only in temples like Thiruvananthapuram Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Thiruvappu Sree Krishna Swamy. For long the former has been blessed by the presence of two Swamiyars.

Arriving at specifics, the Swamiyars of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple came from Thrissur *Naduvil Madhom* in central Kerala and *Munchira Madhom* in eastwhile South Travancore but presently in the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The former tradition is of more ancient vintage. It is worth recollecting that Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar, famous in other parts of India as Krishna leelashukan, with his inalienable bonds with many a Kerala temple including the Temple under survey, is claimed to be from Thrissur *Naduvil Madhom*.



The latter was established in the time of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma in the Seventeen Hundreds in what could also be viewed as a shrewd move in more ways than one. Since the position was of paramount importance, the King would have purposely had an alternative chosen from the other extreme of his geographical territory, transmitting the influence and impact of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple to those politically sensitive and vital areas and enhancing the sway of the Temple through the Swamiyar and his considerable establishment and properties, over those regions. Historians are inclined to view this *Madhom* as an extension of the *Parthivapuram Sala* of yore. *Munchira Madhom* is situated at a stones throw away from the Sree Parthivapuram Temple. The present Swamiyar of this order is the 45th in the line. The two Swamiyars are designated to discharge their duties in the Temple six consecutive months each, annually. Only Namboodiries who were performing an oblation known as *Agnihotram* used to be inducted into their respective *Ashrams* hailing from the three villages of Shukapuram, Peruvanam, and Irinjalkkuta.

The position of the Swamiyar is not hereditary. These days married men also embrace this monastic order renouncing *Grihashthashramam* (married life). At the same time the two hermitages, from where they hail, continue to be the same.

The senior Swamiyar of the respective *Madhoms*, initiates the renunciates newly embracing the monastic order. The *Yogam* used to meet in session in the southern hall of Thiru Ampati to take the decision. The *Swamiyar's* position was historically and administratively vital in the scheme of affairs. He is the ecclesiastical head of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the chief and unavoidable member of the *Ettara Yogam*. He exerted considerable authority and his presence and sanction were mandatory. In the event of his absence from the city for a session, the *Yogam* would meet where he was camping at that time. Though his position continues, with Marthanda Varma the powers of the *Yogam* became almost nil and it continues to operate, at best, as an assenting body.

The main duty of the Swamiyar is to perform the daily *Pushpanjali* to Sree Padmanabha Swamy which represents *Puja* with flowers. *Thulasi* (*Oscymum Sanctum*), *Thamara* (*Nelumbium Speciosum* or Lotus), *Thetti* (*Ixora Coccinea*) and *Nandiyarvattam* (*Tabernacle Montana*) are the flowers used by him. He is present inside the *Sreekovil* in the morning hours only, from about 6.00 to 8.00 a.m. when this worship is performed. Normally he has no other ritualistic duty to discharge. Being a saffron-clad renunciate, he has the right to the *Dandu* denoting his status, which he alone is entitled to take with him into the sanctum.<sup>1</sup> This is his privilege. The Swamiyar is allowed to resort only

1. All Brahmin sages hold the right to ascend the *Ottakkal Mandapam*, *Dandu* in hand, and receive the *Prasadam*.



to the holy *Pranava Maha Mantram* which enfolds within it the quintessence of all sacred sound and word groups. He performs *Pushpanjali* at the Sree Narasimha and Sree Krishna shrines as well. In the event of the Nambies being unable to do the worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the Tantries too are not available, the Swamiyar then conducts the worship with certain limitations (which are elaborated upon later in this chapter).

The Swamiyar's role is a must during the *Anujna* when formal permission is accorded to the Maharaja to conduct the *Utsavam* of the Temple. The *Ettara Yogam* meets to decide on this issue but even in the absence of the other members, the sanction can be accorded provided the Swamiyar is present. In his absence the *Anujna* cannot take place. The final assent is obtained symbolically from the Lord Himself.

The presence of the Swamiyar is required on the eighth day of the *Utsavam* at the night *Siveli* for offering *Kanikka*.<sup>2</sup> He also participates in the *Makara* and *Karkkataka Sivelies* for the same purpose. In case of unavoidable absence his deputy submits the money offering to the Deity on the Swamiyar's behalf.

It is he who officiates during the assumption and relinquishment of the offices of the four Nambies who are the Chief Priests. Before assumption of office, *Kutaettam* as it is known, the order of appointment is read by the designated officer. The Swamiyar then hands over the circular cadjan-leaf *Kuta* (umbrella) to the concerned Nambi who receive it from him after prostrating himself before him. While the Swamiyar sits, the Nambi is in a kneeling position with one knee bent.<sup>3</sup> When a Nambi relinquishes office he puts down his umbrella, prostrates himself before the Swamiyar thrice, receives a cloth, which is termed *Dukha Koti* (ദുഃഖകോടി) which is indicative of sadness of departure, and leaves. These ceremonies take place in the south-western elevated corner area which comes before the *Anantasayanam* wall-picture commences. This area is the famous *Mahabharathakonu*, which has featured so much in the colourful history of this Temple as a witness to many a decisive event.

The Swamiyar and the Nambi ascend the *Ottakkal Mandapam* only after getting the clearance of the Thirumaeni-Kaval-Kurup who is the special security of the innermost areas of the Temple. The Kurup does not stand on the *Mandapam* but leaves it before either of them touches it.

According to custom, whenever the Swamiyar walks to and from the Temple, whether it be day or night, the *Kolu Vilakku* (lamp hanging from a curved hook suspended from a rod) is taken ahead of him as a mark of honour, by an attendant. Without being led by this lamp, he is not bound to move even if his presence is urgently required.

2. *Offering of money.*

3. *Vide chapter 'Worship of the Celestial' - The Nambies.*



There are certain other privileges enjoyed by the Swamiyar as of right. One set of *Ona Villu* submitted to the Deities belongs to him. This is considered most sacred and in great demand by the devotees. He also gets a fixed quantum of rice, money etc. as running expenses from the Temple.

When a *Sanyasin* expires it is known as *Samadhi*. So also *Samadhi* is the place where the body of a *Sanyasin* is put to rest. When a Pushpanjali Swamiyar attains *Samadhi* the body is taken to his own *Madhom*. Should this occur while in Thiruvananthapuram, certain elaborate rituals used to be observed. The body seated in a palanquin would be brought through the *Sivelippura* to the area of the eastern corridor in front of the flag staff. The Nambi would send *Prasadam* to be put on the body through his *Periya Santhi*. It would then be connected by means of a long chain of *Darbha* (*Imperata Cylindrica*) to the main reclining Idol of the Lord. After certain rites, one of the priests would cut this chain connecting the Idol and the Swamiyar into two, signifying release from all types of bondage. Thereafter the body is carried in circumambulation through the outer corridors. One special aspect to be noted is that there was no death pollution in this instance and no purificatory rites were subsequently performed. The connected expenses for these rites used to be met by the Palace Treasury. It is seen from the Thrissur *Naduvil Madhom* records that on 25th *Makaram* 1104 ME (Feb. 1929) the Pushpanjali Swamiyar of the *Madhom* Sree Sree Mayapallippadu Vasudeva Bharathikal who was a resident in Thiruvananthapuram attained *Samadhi*. All the rites detailed above were conducted. His *Samadhi* is in the *Madhom* premises in the Fort. This was during the Regency when Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi ruled. Sree Ramaswamy Iyer, retired Manager of the Thrissur *Naduvil Madhom*, who now lives in the Fort, was an eye witness to this event. He has confirmed its authenticity to the author in person.

Both these *Madhoms* have temples and vast properties in their names. Some of the temples rank among the important ones in the State. While the *Naduvil Madhom* is in itself the main establishment, the *Munchira Madhom* connects its origin to the *Thrikkaikkattu Madhom* of Tanur in Malappuram District.

The *Naduvil Madhom* traces its origin beyond the 9th century. The links existing between Vilvamangalam Swamiyar who lived in the former half of the 9th century, and the Sree Ananthapuram Temple in Kasargode are part of the history of that area. Scholars from Kasargode state that there are enough records to substantiate that Vilvamangalam accepted his vows of renunciation from the *Naduvil Madhom*. While the position of the Swamiyar is believed to have been in existence well before this time in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the specific function of performing *Pushpanjali* to the Lord, the tradition of the coconut shell and the rule that this Swamiyar should be from



the *Naduvil Madhom* would have come into force with Vilvamangalam Swamiyar's arrival in Anantankatu and the subsequent events.

A *Churuna* dated ME 665/5/15-1490 AD, speaks of the appointment of Chelamarutoor Advaitanubhooti Pishara Thiruvadi by Keezhperur Veera Iravi Iravi Varma after removing Devadevanubhooti Pishara Thiruvadi.<sup>4</sup> This not only highlights the ancient character of the institution of the 'Swamiyar' but shows that circumstances warranting, the Swamiyar could be changed.

The induction of a *Swamiyar* (renunciate) to perform daily *Pushpanjali* is rarely seen in Temples even in Kerala. It is a tradition in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple of utmost sanctity.

Most of the information regarding these two *Swamiyar Madhoms* has been obtained from Sree Sree Astamurthi Bharatikal Elaya Swamiyar (junior Swamiyar) of *Naduvil Madhom* and Sree Sree Krishna Dasa Vasudeva Brahmanda Teerthar, Periya (senior Swamiyar) of *Munchira Madhom*, and Prof. M.G. Sasibhooshan.

## The Tantries

The Tarananalloor Namboodiripads of Irinjalakkuta have held the vaunted position of Tantries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple from bygone ages.<sup>5</sup> Along with the Pushpanjali Swamiyar, they establish the Namboodiri supremacy in the worship of the Lord, occupying key posts in religious administration. The standing of this community in other related Temple affairs is again illustrated by the fact that the participants of the *Murajapam* were only of Namboodiri community. In all matters concerning the spiritual heritage of the Temple including codes of conduct or any deviation from accepted precedent, the Tantri's ruling was and continues to be not only essential but final. These Tantries, like the Tantries in all other temples, are hereditary. One aspect which cannot be overlooked is that, while the Tantries can substitute under certain special circumstances like officiating in the place of the Nambies or chief priests who are unable to discharge their duties of worship, they themselves cannot be substituted. Though the Swamiyar performs the *Pujas* of the chief Nambies failing the Tantries he also cannot take over the rituals performed by them. They would stand delayed till the Tantries are able to do so. Many are the instances which appear in the *Churunas* which register the delay or suspension of the *Utsavam* even after it had started, due to the Tantries having pollution. The festivals would be resumed only after they became free again. In the post - Marthanda Varma period, records reveal that the *Utsavam* was postponed thrice. They were in the time of Sree Karthika Thirunal Dharmaraja in

4. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Some Important Mathilakam Records Churuna* 2602, Ola 31. Document No. 28.

5. Refer chapter 'The Guardians of Temple Tradition'.



940 ME/1765 AD during the *Painkuni Utsavam* when the festival had to be suspended on the 4th day, in the time of Sree Ayillyom Thirunal in 1038 ME/1862 AD during *Alpashi Utsavam* when also the festival had to be re-scheduled and lastly during the time of Sree Uthradom Thirunal in 1169 ME/1994 AD when the *Alpashi Utsavam* had to be postponed. All these were due to the unavailability of the Tantries following family pollution. This ruling holds good in all the ceremonies conducted by them. Unlike the Pushpanjali Swamiyar and the priests of the Temple, their presence is demanded only for certain occasions and special functions involving many *Tantric* rites.

The Tarananalloor Tantries adhere to an elaborate system of *Mantram* leaning heavily on *Tantram* (which should in no way be confused with *Vamachara Tantram*) It is so complex and concentrated that they claim that what is done elsewhere over a period of months has to be performed sometimes in one day in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Apart from the overwhelming emphasis given to *Tantram* which is channelised to increase the potency of the Divinities within, the colouring of kingship has also contributed to this concentration of rites and rituals. While all over Kerala, the Namboodiri Brahmins accept the *Tantra Samuchayam* as the authority, these Tantries stand out as an exception.<sup>6</sup> In this Temple they follow a separate manual entrusted directly to their forefathers by Sree Parasurama, the *Anushtana Grantham* or the *Parasurama Padhathi* (procedure on rituals and *Saguna* worship). While the Tarananalloor family holds the right of *Tantram* in many temples dedicated to various deities, in six of the ten *Padhathi* Vishnu Temples, where the right of *Tantram* rests with them, the *Padhathi* which has special features is followed. These ten include the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, which is the most important and biggest of them all. It is also the most demanding in terms of the extent of spiritual and ritualistic input required. Variations are seen in the number of *Kalasa*s (pots) for the ritual known as *Kalasam* which comes twice a year, the nature of the celestials invoked in the *Beli* stones and in many of the rituals, while some aspects are secret and known only to them. It is added here that amongst the numerous temples only ten are categorised as *Padhathi* Temples.

*Pujas* are performed to enhance the spiritual concentration in the Deity. An important point is that the *Pujas* performed here daily are *Ethirtu Puja*, *Ucha Puja* and *Athazha Puja*, which are the full *Pujas* as per the *Padhathi Sampradayam*. The other three are only for *Nivedyas* offered at separate times. It was Maharaja Marthanda Varma, the Great, who got the voluminous body of rites and rituals and *Tantram* in vogue in the Temple, properly examined and codified under the direct supervision of the Tantries.

The presence of Namboodiries in the highest posts of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, (viz) the Swamiyar and the Tantries, is at times quoted to

6. Refer chapter 'The Guardians of Temple Tradition'.



establish the Vilvamangalam tradition. Even as great respect is accorded to that sage and his popularly accepted bond with the said Temple, since both the institutions of the Pushpanjali Swamiyar and Tantries existed before the period allotted to Vilvamangalam as is supported by historical data, this theory of interconnection cannot be accepted totally.

## The Nambies

The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has four chief priests termed Nambies and they perform worship inside the sanctums they are attached to. The Periya Nambi is the seniormost and with the Panchagavyathu Nambi who alternates, takes it in monthly turns to perform the worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy inside the *Sreekovil* with full rituals as well as to conduct all the other daily ceremonies like the *Abhishekam*, *Nivedyam*, *Alankaram*, *Deeparadhana* and so on. It is to be noted that their duties relate solely to the Deity. They alone can perform the daily *Beli* rituals and routine, *Deeparadhanas* connected with the *Siveli*. Even during the *Utsavam* the latter ritual continues to be their function. Normally their duties rest exclusively with Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The *Thekkaidathu Nambi* delegated to Sree Narasimha Swamy and the *Thiru Ampati Nambi* attached to Sree Krishna Swamy perform the worship only in their respective shrines. In the event of the Thekkaidathu Nambi or Thiru Ampati Nambi being unable to perform their duties, the Nambies attached to Sree Padmanabha Perumal discharge them on their behalf. At the same time, the former priests are not permitted to perform the latter's duties. These Nambies generally hold a tenure of office for three years and are recommended by their *Desams*. When vacancy arises the Panchagavyathu Nambi succeeds the Periya Nambi. If the Periya Nambi is from *Ikkara Desam*, by custom the Panchagavyathu Nambi is from *Akkara Desam*. Once the Periya Nambi lays down office, he cannot take up the post of priest anywhere else as his entire spiritual input is believed to be deposited with Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

The Nambies stay in the *Nambi Madhom* within the Mithranandapuram complex maintained by the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple during their tenure of office, observing strict celibacy and many other restrictions, their movements being confined to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, this *Ashramam* and to accompanying the Deities for *Palli Vetta* and *Arat* twice a year. They are known as *Kuta Santhies* by virtue of the fact that they have to carry the circular cadjan umbrella or *Kuta* symbol of their status, wherever they move out. Though the system of *Kuta Santhies* was present in many *Mahakshetras* in Kerala for all practical purposes, it seems to be operational in its unsullied form only here.

The four Nambies and all the twenty four Potti priests who are engaged in the service of the Temple originate from the two villages on either side of the Chandragiri river. They are commonly known as *Akkara Desies* from four



specific *Madhoms* of Brahmasree Yoga Sabha of Neeleswaram of Kokkada village in Udipi and *Ikkara Desies* from ten *Illoms* under Brahmasree Pulloor Yoga Sabha of Pulloor village, those from the outer *Kara* (bank) going by the former appellation and those from the inner bank (which lies in Kerala), by the latter. The *Akkara Desies* are Tulu Brahmins and *Ikkara Desies* Malayala Brahmins. They all claim common descent from Divakara Muni (Refer chapter *God's Domain*).

The *Mantropadesam* (initiation with sacred chants) is common to all the four Nambies and is imparted to them either by the other Nambies in service or by the Tantries if they are available. The Nambies prostrate themselves before the Swamiyar before taking up office and after relinquishing the same, in between they are barred from this act under any circumstance.

There are twenty four Santhies employed by the Temple, as mentioned earlier, for the performance of the manifold religious duties. From among them, on monthly rotation, one priest each is selected by the officiating Nambies of the three sanctums to discharge the subsidiary duties connected with them which are of a specific nature. They are among the designated priests with access to the *Sreekovils*. To differentiate them from the remaining twenty one priests they are known as *Periya Santhies*. The Periya Santhi attached to Sree Padmanabha Swamy carries out the duties at Sree Rama Swamy's shrine as well.

The strict ruling that one section of Tulu Brahmins should be appointed as priests could possibly have originated from Divakara Muni of yore mentioned in the *Puranas* (not to be mistaken for another Divakara Muni who also features in the narrations of this Temple though much later in the calendar of time). Despite practical problems at times, it is an ongoing tradition uncomprisingly followed in the Temple.

According to the 44th Swamiyar of the *Munchira Madhom*, Sri Sri Krishna Dasa Vasudeva Brahmananda Teertha Periya Swami, the *Dhyanaslokam* (meditative verse) is the famous *Shantakaram*. The full text of the same is as follows.

शान्ताकारं भुजगशयनं पद्मनाभं सुरेशं  
विश्वाधारं गगनसदृशं मेघवर्णं शुभांगम्  
लक्ष्मिकान्तं कमलनयनं योगिहृद्धानगम्यं  
वन्दे विष्णुं भवभयहरं सर्वलोकैकनाथम् ।

I propitiate Sree Padmanabha.  
Who is the basis of the earth.  
Who reposes on the serpent.  
Who is the Lord paramount of all celestials.



Who assumes the material universe as the gross form.

Who resembles space.

Who is of the hue of clouds.

Who possesses an auspicious physique.

Who is the Beloved of Lakshmi.

Who is lotus-eyed.

Who is attainable to ascetics in their heart through meditation.

Who is omnipresent.

Who is the destroyer of the cycle of birth and death.

Who is the Supreme Sovereign of all the worlds.

The basic inner incantation which is the *Moola Mantram* is never revealed in any temple and is a closely guarded secret. It holds good for the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as well.

The ritualistic worship performed to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy is *Vishnu Puja* with certain variations based on the nature of the Deity involved. Even in temples where Sree Krishna is consecrated, as in Thiru Ampati, it is *Vishnu Puja* that is carried out *Krishna Puja*, while it exists, is rare. Sree Padmanabha Swamy is conceptualised as *Shantaswaroopa Paramananda Yogamoorthy* (Yogic incarnation of peace and extreme bliss) though many devotees hail Him as *Bhoga Moorthy*, the generous dispenser of boons. Sree Narasimha Swamy seen close by on the south is, in contrast, full of fury and fire as the *Ugra Moorthy*. Sree Krishna has had different identities as originally it is claimed that He was a *Goshala Krishna* (the Lord who reigned in the cow sheds and among the herds). For a long time now he has the projection of Parthasarathy, the royal charioteer of Partha, the Pandava.

Among the different disciplines of Vaishnava worship the system of *Pancharatram* holds a very prominent position. It was directly imparted to Sage Narada by the Supreme Narayana Himself, who in turn taught it to Udhava within the span of five nights (gaining for it the said name). *Pancharatram* literature glorifies image worship as even superior to the *Vedas*. Whatever that be, the idols have been held as very necessary to conceive and meditate on God, as is pointed out in the *Vishnu Samhita*. The Tulu Brahmin priests of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are followers of *Pancharatram* but adhere to the *Tantra Samuchayam* with differences in the conduct of the rituals. The rituals are conducted as *Shodasopachara Puja*—the sixteen—pronged worship to propitiate the Divine.



The Nambies have to take an oath of secrecy before first entering the *Sreekovil* that whatever is understood or seen inside will not be revealed outside. As such certain aspects remain veiled in secrecy. Even they are forbidden to look behind the main Idol.

Hence three different lines of worship appear and finally amalgamate at one centre. The Potti group with *Pancharatram*, the Tantries with the *Padhathi Sampradayam* and the Swamiyar with the *Pranava Mantram* all gravitate along their accepted paths to the feet of the God in sublime worship. Since the concept of Sree Padmanabha Swamy is as the supreme Monarch as well, many of the special rituals performed here in right royal style like the *Murajapam* are specifically meant for the peace and prosperity of His subjects.

Categorisation of duties and designations which were all hereditary barring one or two, along with detailed instructions covering even the minutest points of procedure and precedent have been carefully recorded and rerecorded in the wealth of *Churunas* found from the *Grantha-pura* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. They have been accepted in times of doubt as the final authority independently, or as aids to help the Tantries to arrive at a ruling. Rigid observance of custom and tradition is seen to have been insisted upon not only due to the conviction about their correctness and essentiality but also due to the belief that what has been decreed by the ancients in their wisdom would be the unquestioned best. Consequently the rites, rituals and majority of special days including the festivals carry on them the label of ancient vintage and continue in their original purity. Even when faced with total reversals of fortune ushering in their wake inevitable reductions of the once lavish customs and functions, it has to be underlined in red that nothing was dispensed with but only reduced in magnitude, except what was totally related to the royal aspect.

The *Churunas*, adequately spell out the guidelines for the rites, rituals, *Pujas*, festivals, special days, duties of the Swamiyar, the Tantries and the Nambies, duties of each and every employee of the Temple, duties and rights of the rulers, commodities to be utilised, their procurement and pricing and the whole area of Temple and Temple-associated functions and activities. In case the Nambies are unable to discharge their duties due to unavoidable reasons, the same devolves on the Tantries who perform them with the Swamiyar's consent and failing them on the Swamiyar himself. If it be the Pushpanjali Swamiyar who officiates, since he is not allowed to perform the full orthodox system of worship being a renunciate, certain unavoidable omissions occur. While the Swamiyar performs many aspects of worship when he substitutes he cannot accompany the rituals with ringing of the hand bell normally essential for this type of *Puja* nor is he allowed to perform the important ritual of offering *Beli* (sanctified food) to the various concentrations of divinities of the Temple. A few such records are being incorporated here to illustrate the meticulous registering followed for long.



This record dates back to 19th of *Kumbhom* 736 ME/1561 AD during the rulership of King Veera Kerala Varma. The text translates as follows:<sup>7</sup>

*"Kesavan Kesavan of Maruthampadi, the Periya Nambi of the Temple, could not be present as he was disabled by old age. Then the Panchagavyathu Nambi Kesavan Sivan of Savaram officiated as the chief priest (Periya Nambi) till 29th Meenom 732 ME/1557 AD. But his life was taken away on that date by smallpox. Therefore Kesavan Kesavan, despite old age and inability, performed these duties for some time but he too was laid up soon. Thereupon the Pushpanjali Swamiyar himself took up the functions of the chief priest. But, on the 11th of Kumbhom, 736 ME/1561 AD the Temple Varyam had to be conducted for which the Periya Nambi and the Panchagavyathu Nambi had to be present in the Temple. Hence Kesavan Kesavan of Maruthampadi (Periya Nambi) was taken in a stretcher to the Temple and ceremonies in connection with<sup>8</sup> Variappakarcha were conducted."*

In like manner *Churuna* 2A, *Ola* 26 of the *Mathilakam* Records of the year 741 ME/1566 AD, states that due to death pollution for Panchagavyathu Nambi (alternating chief priest) Edavadi Narayanan Vishnu, the Periya Swamiyar, conducted the *Pujas* instead. Veera Adithya Varma and Unni Kerala Varma were in positions of power at that time.

A record of 780 ME/1605 AD also runs on similar lines. Due to death pollution for Periya Nambi, Tantri Tarananalloor Somathitri performed the rituals as per the procedure.

## The Yogathil Potties

The traditional and at many times pivotal role played by the *Yogathil Potties* in the governance of matters relating to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and consequently to the fortunes of this fair land of Travancore has repeatedly gone on record. Not only in religious issues but as landlords with vast acreage under their control, along with the ownership of many temples situated in various places which were more often than not theirs by royal bounty, they commanded important positions in the fabric of the land itself. Majority representation in the *Ettara Yogam* automatically rested with them, so also the right of *Tantram* in a wide graph of temples including Thiruvattar the affairs of which lay intimately bound with Venad's ruling dynasties. Their presence on all special functions and days of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as when the Nambies assume or relinquish office, *Anujna*, *Kotiettu*, *Utsavas*, on the day of the *Dakshina* following the *Utsavas* etc other than the deliberations of the *Yogam* and their selective presence in rotation of two members daily when the

7. Dr. K Maheswaran Nair – *Chronicles of the Trivandrum Pagoda*.

8. *Variappakarcha* – *Transfer of the right of Varyam*.



*Sreekovil* doors close for the night was all essential. Even now these functions continue to exist though in minimised form. The Potties and their representatives are in routine attendance when the *Natas* are secured after night worship. They are expected to present themselves the day prior to the *Utsavam* and to receive the *Chotta* (small handled sword) and *Kacha* (cloth) from the Valia Thampuram. It is in accordance with the signal transmitted by hand by them from the Western *Nata* that the *Vahanas* venture forth for the *Vetta* and *Arat* procession. The *Kshetrakaryam Potti* represents the King and in that capacity takes part in the formal processions as well as when royal absence becomes inevitable. This Potti is deputed to take the *Kacha*, stick (which is the symbol of authority) and a specified sum of money from the King to the *Madhom* of *Yogathil Potti* when that Potti expires. These Potties enjoy the rare privilege of worship on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* without the public and of receiving from the Nambi the *Vattaka Prasadam* as they stand at the central doorway. There is a difference in the names of the *Madhoms* available in the records. The second list of names as currently available from the *Mathilakam* office is appended below.

1. *Pushpanjali Swamiyar*
2. *Muttal/Muttanila* (shortened to *Mottola*) *Madhom*
3. *Neythasari* *Madhom*
4. *Sreekaryathu* *Madhom*
5. *Athiyara* (*Kollur*) *Madhom*
6. *Athiyara* (*Vanchiyoore*) *Madhom*
7. *Kookkara* *Madhom* (*Koopakkara* *Madhom* according to one version)
8. *Karuna* *Madhom*
9. *Karanatha Kurup*

(The last mentioned term *Kshetrakaryam* seems to have been used as a title in the past by the identified member of the *Yogam* rather than as a separate *Madhom*).<sup>9</sup> The term of the *Karanattu Kurup* is conspicuous by its absence. As of now only the first five *Madhoms* keep up regular contact with this Temple.

## Other Aspects

Certain elasticity in rituals is permitted at times should the situation warrant it. For this too the assent of the Tantries is unavoidable. The *Churunas* read of the change in the time of the flag hoisting, which signals the beginning of the Temple festival, as well as the *Palli Vetta* ceremony,<sup>9</sup> due to the occurrence of the solar and lunar eclipses. Both were preponed and the *Vetta* concluded before 6.00 p.m. instead of the usual 9.00 p.m.

9. 1. *Mathilakam Records - Churuna II, Olas 254-257.*

2. *Mathilakam Records - Churuna II, Olas 258-267.*

00 Sreekaryathu Madhom and Karanatha Kurup possess half right each thus bringing the total to eight.



Another important directive appears in the Temple manuals and was propounded in Maharaja Swathi Thirunal's time. It rules that in case of unconfirmed doubt of pollution, it need not be taken into account and that the worship can be carried on as usual.<sup>10</sup>

Among the many unique features of worship in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, a special note is made that in several places, instead of the conch, so inevitable in Vishnu worship, the coconut shell is substituted and rituals performed with it.

The *Ottakkal Mandapam*, due to its unusual positioning, is considered in concept to be an extension of the *Sreekovil*. As such many specialities, restrictions and separate sanctity are accorded to it and to the rituals performed on it. The *Abhishekam*, which is always done in the sanctum elsewhere, is performed to the Deities on this *Mandapam*. The ceremony termed *Kalabham* also is conducted on this *Mandapam*. No one is allowed to touch it when the Swamiyar, Tantries, Nambies and Periya Santhi are standing on it or when the rituals take place there. It is essential that one of them other than the Periya Santhi be inside the sanctum for the people to ascend this *Mandapam* for worship. None can lie prostrate on it. Anything falling there becomes, property of the Temple as what falls in the sanctum is normally not taken back. The Royal Family alone enjoys the honour of placing the male children on this *Mandapam* on their first birthdays and dedicating them to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, to be thenceforth known as 'Sree Padmanabha Dasas' (vide chapter *In Majestic Slavery*).

Normally in all temples only two sets of idols are seen for each Deity, the *Moola Bimbam* (main idol) and the *Siveli* idol. In the sanctum of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, three sets of idols are present. The main Idol, the one for *Abhishekam* and the third for *Siveli*. This had become necessary since the *Moola Bimbam* being of *Katu- Sarkara* no *Abhishekam* could be performed on it.

There has been the long standing taboo on trying to see behind the Idol. This restriction is adhered to.

Likewise only the Swamiyar, the Tantries, Periya Nambi and the Panchagavyathu Nambi have the right and privilege to touch the *Moola Bimbam* as well as all the *Abhishekam* Idols of gold. While the Periya Santhi has entry into the sanctum, he can handle only the silver *Siveli* idol of the God which, among other duties, he carries on his head during the daily *Siveli*. He is prohibited from touching the other Idols.

The ritual of *Deeparadhana* is not indigenous to Kerala temple worship but was imported from neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Even now in many of the private

10. *Mathilakam Records* – Churuna 2, Ola 91.



temples of the Namboodiri houses, this ritual is absent. At times a wick is lit in a coconut shell or a camphor block is placed on the ground and lit but it does not signify this rite. Yet, by and large, in almost all the temples in Kerala, *Deeparadhana* is conducted as a very important act of worship with the use of lamps and is symbolically significant. In Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple too this is the case and the *Deeparadhana* after sunset is extremely important and attracts great numbers. The utilisation of many different types of lamps, six to be exact, is unusual (Refer chapter *The Inner Radiance*).

Despite the synthesis of Kerala and Tamil-Dravidian influences, this Temple has shown no compromise when it comes to preserving its purity or concept of *Suddhi*. Generally the temples on the west coast attach much importance to this aspect but in the case of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple it is seen in the superlative degree. Strict regulation of dress is also in force.

The *Brahman* lends Himself to being attributed to the initial qualities of illumination and resonance as *Tejah Brahman* and *Nada Brahman*. The vibrations of any sound emitted never merge into nothingness but remain lodged somewhere in the layers of the atmosphere or stratosphere. The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has the continuing collective concentration of positive potency gathered from the untold years of prayers and chanting of the sacred texts and incantations by countless throats. It is indeed a special benediction of the Deity that despite greatly altered circumstances, the reading of the sacred texts and chanting of the *Vedas* and other *Mantras* have gone on as an unbroken tradition. The spiritual wealth of these heard and unheard prayers, past and present, enhances the already great sanctity of the atmosphere within the Temple.

Daily recitals and readings carried out here, which cannot be found in most other temples to this extent, are being mentioned. On the expansive *Vathil Madom* to the north of the central corridor, during the morning hours, three priests recite the *Vishnu Sahasranamam*, *Namaskaram* and *Bhagyasooktham*. Simultaneously on the south platform three Brahmins chant the *Rig*, *Sama* and *Yajur Vedas*, and another Brahmin intones the *Narayana Kavacham* and one reads from the *Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabandham* authored by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal. While seven out of the eight Brahmins face the west, only the reader of the *Prabandham* is seen facing the north. On the southern side of the Sree Narasimha Swamy shrine, daily reading of the *Valmiki Ramayanam* is done all through the time the shrine remains open except during certain rituals. One full round takes a total of fourteen days. This is believed to be done also with the intention of pacifying the fury of Sree Narasimha Swamy. This Narasimha Swamy's potency is a byword and all the priests except the Nambies are seen prostrating themselves before Him before assuming daily duties. The Brahmin sits facing west. Three idols of Sree Hanuman Swamy, one made of



*Jiva Dandam*, the others of silver and brass stand as silent listeners to the reading. *Avil*, *Padatti Pazham* and jaggery are offered to them before the *Ethirtu Puja*. Near the *Mahabharathakonu*, three Tamil Brahmins, facing east chant the *Vishnu Sahasranamam* in the morning. Close by at the Sree Veda Vyasa shrine at the same time three Brahmins repeat the *Purushasooktham*, *Geethathrustippu* and *Sreepadasooktam*. On the *Namaskara Mandapam* of the Thiru Ampati Temple a Brahmin sits facing the north and reads the *Bhagavatham* and *Mahabharatham* morning and evening for a specified period of time.

Special renderings of other holy texts are done to mark certain days. On the full moon day, *Sahasranamam* chanting by a good number of Brahmins is done on the *Kulasekhara Mandapam*.

Among the unusual spiritual aspects of the Temple, apart from those already referred to, a feature to be strongly emphasised is about the Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna shrine. It will be more accurate if it is taken as a separate Temple within the main Temple complex. Exhibiting an independent identity all its own, from undated past the Temple, the oldest existing construction today, possesses its own *Belikkal*, *Dhwaja Sthambham*, front *Mandapam*, its separate *Kalasam* ceremony and *Utsavam* which is its own but which runs along with the main festival. Sree Krishna has a distinct route of entry and exit for all the *Sivelies*.

Due to an infrastructure which is not common, while there are no changes in the fundamental *Moola Mantram* (basic incantation of the Divinity in question), variations are seen in the other *Mantras*, in certain *Puja* norms, rituals and codes of conduct in this Temple. Normally these are not elaborated upon for general information.

Reciting of hymns of praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in a sing-song style after the *Deeparadhana* is a regular feature here. These verses known as *Ghattiyams*, are eighty three in number and in an impressive array of five languages, Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Hindi. Surprisingly Malayalam seems to have been excluded. These came as a much later innovation as they all took birth from the devotion of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal. They are chanted daily after the evening *Deeparadhana* inside the sanctum and after the same ritual connected to the routine night *Siveli* at the two entrances. For all the *Sivelies* including those of the *Utsavas*, the *Ghattiyam* is recited by two Brahmins, one after the other, at the eastern and western entrances and after the *Arat Deeparadhana* on the sea shore.

*Ashtabandham* is a process by which when the idol is found to be shaking it is refixed to the base using a cementing mixture. The ingredients are as listed below and in the given proportions for one measure of this compound.

- |    |               |   |                |   |          |
|----|---------------|---|----------------|---|----------|
| 1. | Sankhu Powder | – | Powdered Conch | – | 6 Palams |
| 2. | Chenchalyam   | – | Shorea Robesta | – | 4 Palams |



- |    |   |   |                                     |   |           |
|----|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|-----------|
| 3. | Katukka   | – | Tirminalia Chebulu                  | – | 2 Palams  |
| 4. | Kolarakku   | – | Lac                                 | – | 1 Palam   |
| 5. | Kozhipparal   | – | a special stone<br>ground to powder | – | 1 Palam   |
| 6. | Manal   | – | Sand                                | – | 1 Palam   |
| 7. | Nellikka (Gooseberry)   | – | Emblica Officinalis                 | – | 1/2 Palam |
| 8. | Cotton wool with seeds removed.<br>(One Palam is equal to sixty grams). |   |                                     |   |           |

All the ingredients are powdered together using thick matchets of wood by a group of priests for a specified number of hours which may go up to many days. The cotton wool lends more elasticity to the mixture. *Kozhipparal*, which is one of the eight ingredients, used to be in short supply and was available only with this Temple.

After the *Ashtabandham* in the Thiru Ampati Temple around 1985 during the time of Sree Chithira Thirunal, 1999 saw the repetition of this ceremony here by the Tantries. It is customary for them to officiate in such major rituals.

Basic ceremonial rituals and daily offerings are mandatory to preserve the sanctity of a Temple. They act as the hallowed fuel to feed the fires of spiritual potency. The radiations of divinity increase or decrease in concentration and efficacy depending on the devotion and dedication of worship offered to the Deities.

## A Traditional Verse

There is a verse in Sanskrit lovingly handed down by word of mouth presenting the different Divinities within this Temple. Its author was a reputed scholar and court poet by name Gomathydasan Ilathoor Ramaswamy Sastrikal who was a contemporary of Maharajas Ayillyom and Vishaghom Thirunals. (Ilathoor is a place near to Shenkottah)

श्रीकृष्णं श्रेत्रपालं ध्वजबलिसंहितं भूतनाथं नृसिंहं  
व्यासं शंभुं गणेशं रघुवरमनुजं जानकीं वायुपुत्रम् ।  
विष्वक्रसेनं सुपर्णं सुरमुनिकमलाभूमिब्रह्मादिसेव्यं  
वन्दे श्रीपद्मनाभं परमपदमहो पन्नगाभोगशायिन् ॥

*I worship Sree Krishna, Kshetrapala, Dhawaja Stambha (flagmast), Bhoothanatha (Sastha), Narasimha, Veda Vyasa, Siva, Ganesha, Sree Rama, His brother Lakshmana, Janaki, Hanuman (son of Vayu), Vishvaksena and Suparana (Garuda). Oh God resting on the body of the Serpent! I worship You Sree Padmanabha of Supreme status who is served by the celestials, sages, Goddesses Lakshmi and Bhoomi (the Earth) as well as by Brahma the Creator.*



## Daily Routine

A day in the life of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple unfolds with the pre-dawn hours when the dark night curtains remain drawn across the expanse of the firmament. Cool early morning breezes, pure and untouched by the coming day's activities, soft circumambulate the serene abode of the Lord, the mighty Perumal, in silent homage.

At about 3.30 a.m. the Temple slowly stirs to life. The arrival of the Periya Santhies marks the time for the special inside security, the Thirumeni Kaval Kurup who retains the keys of all the three shrines, to open the *Cheruchuttu* enclosure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy's sanctum. This priest gets the keys of the main sanctum from the Kurup and unlocks the central door. He lights the several lamps inside which have been left in readiness the previous night, with a flame taken from one of the six eternal lamps burning within. A total of eleven lamps are present here. The middle double doors, though unlocked, are kept partially closed. Coming out on to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* the Periya Santhi supervises the ingredients required for the *Panchagavyam*,<sup>11</sup> prepares it and keeps it ready for the Periya Nambi's arrival. Lamps on the *Ottakkal Mandapam*, hanging lamps and silver lamps outside the three doors reflect and counter reflect light which is caught and thrown back by the rows of bells. A subdued radiance envelops the gold-covered pillars. Outside darkness throws into sharp relief the glowing flames, harbingers to the Brilliance within, soon to stand revealed.

By 4.00 a.m. the Periya Nambi or the Panchagavyathu Nambi depending on whose monthly turn it is, arrives. After washing his feet with water specially got ready for this purpose, he ascends the steps of the *Mandapam*. Sitting on a *Aamappalaka* (oval wooden plank) he prays on the *Panchagavyam*. By this time the public have already gathered and stand waiting outside. The Nambi purifies the area around by sprinkling the *Panchagavyam* and immediately enters the sanctum after ringing the gold bell suspended outside the central entrance. The time would be 4.10 a.m. by then. Soon after, the public are permitted inside for the *Nirmalya Darsanam* or the first vision of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.<sup>12</sup>

The Nambi opens the already, unlocked front door while the Periya Santhi, who is his assistant, opens the two remaining doors of the sanctum. By then auspicious music rises into the silence like a joyous outburst of melody in praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. This music termed *Pandi-vadyam*<sup>13</sup> is played

11. A preparation made of five products got from the cow which is considered very sacred, possessing purificatory powers.

12. Tamil devotees define this as *Viswaroopa Darsanam*.

13. This *Vadyam* is so named as it is performed by people from *Pandi Nadu* and should not be confused with the traditional *Pandi Melam* which is not performed in this Temple.



by a group of four musicians performing on a special <sup>14</sup>*Kurunkuzhal*, *Sruti* and *Thakil* accompanied by the blowing of the *Sankhu*. This is to awaken the Perumal from slumber.

The previous days flowers are removed from the main Idol by gently brushing them off with peacock feathers. Decorations from the other idols are taken away by hand. All these are done only by the Nambi.

A big silver platform is brought to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* and tender coconut water and *Panchamritham* (a mixture of five sweet ingredients of banana, ghee, jaggery, honey and crystallised sugar) are placed near by. After the *Puja* (flower worship) the Nambi brings the three *Abhishekam* idols in gold of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Lakshmi Devi and Bhoomi Devi one by one and places them on this platform facing east. While the Periya Santhi is barred from touching these idols he can touch the silver *Siveli* Idol of Swamy which he brings from inside, to this platform along with the *Siva Lingam* and *Salagrama*. As each idol emerges, the conch is blown and bell is rung. *Abhishekam* commences soon after. *Pandi-vadyam* continues to be played from then right through to the conclusion of the *Deeparadhana* while *Thimila Pani* (referred to as *Panchavadyam*) by another set of musicians is played only for the *Abhishekam*.

The Periya Nambi or Panchagavyathu Nambi as the case may be, performs the *Abhishekam* which corresponds to the process of bathing. Only for this *Abhishekam* is the conch used. For all the remaining *Abhishekas* it is the coconut shell which is utilised instead. The Periya Nambi or Panchagavyathu Nambi does *Puja* with this *Cheratta* which is the local term for coconut shell. This is a unique characteristic of this Temple. Like all other such functions, it translates as an act of worship. Oblation is done with water, *Panchagavyam*, *Panchamritham*, tender coconut water, pure cow's milk and after cleaning the idols, once again with water. The entire process is accompanied by the continuous chanting of sacred verses by the Nambi himself. Water taken from a well reserved specially for the use of the Deities alone can be utilised. They are then dried and *Alankaram*, (decoration) with flowers and jewels is done to them. The public now has to vacate the place as it is time for the Deity to partake sanctified food offering known as *Nivedyam* consisting of puffed rice, plantain and *Uppumanga* (salted unripe mango).

This ritual over, once again the public are permitted inside to witness the *Deeparadhana* using the seven tiered lamp and the usual circular plain camphor hand lamp. Thereafter, accompanied by the blowing of the conch, the Idols are returned to the *Sreekovil*. *Pushpanjali* is done by the Nambi.

- 
14. 1. *Kurunkuzhal* – piped instrument, short in length known as seen only in this Temple.  
 2. *Thakil* – Percussion instrument like a drum, beaten on both sides.  
 3. *Sruti* – Harmonium.



With very little time gap, the process of opening the sanctums as well as the conduct of all rituals in the shrines of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy are carried out by their respective Nambies. The worship of Sree Rama Swamy is done by the Periya Santhi of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, while Sree Veda Vyasa, Sree Sastha and Sree Kshetrapalan have the same performed by designated Santhies. Sree Vishvakshenan being the Nirmalya Moorthy partakes of the *Nivedyam* offered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Agrashala Sree Ganapathy follows a separate system which is adhered to by a priest appointed for the same. *Nivedyam* is offered at the *Thevaram* of Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal as well.

In the meantime clarified butter (ghee) and sandal which has been ground to paste by a priest, are brought. Under the direct supervision of the Nambi, four priests have to do prayers on the ghee while four other priests pray on the sandal paste. Both are required for the afternoon worship.

After the distribution of the *Prasadam* the area is again cleared of all people for the *Usha Nivedyam*, the fairly elaborate dawn offering. Before that the necessary purificatory rites are done on a small scale. *Sarkara Payasam* (jaggery and rice sweet offering) *Uppumanga*, plain cooked rice, *Kadali* the plantain, *Thrimadhuram* (plantain cut into round pieces with ghee and jaggery added to it) are the *Nivedyas* offered as the Swamy's repast. The entire quantity is brought and placed on the *Mandapam* by the priests and part of it taken inside the sanctum by the Nambi. The cooking medium is pure ghee and preparation of the *Nivedyas*, handling them and even entering the kitchen area are restricted to the priests who have these duties entrusted to them.

Fairly soon after, another array of *Nivedyas* including a rice-milk-sugar delicacy known either as *Valia Palppayasam* or *Pantheeradi Palppayasam*, a type of rice preparation by name *Pongal* (which is indicative of Tamil influence being very popular in that region), Plantain, *Thrimadhuram*, *Uppumanga*, *Malar* (puffed rice), *Sarkara Payasam* etc. are submitted. Once that ritual is over, the *Mandapam* is cleared and the women sweep the place sprinkling water and wipe the area dry.

In all the other shrines, rituals and *Nivedyas* are performed by the priests to whom these duties have been individually assigned.

By this time it would be about 5.45 a.m. and the *Ethirtu Puja* (the worship which welcomes the day) commences. The public are not allowed inside. In between the *Puja* the Nambi goes to the sacred kitchen to perform oblation of fire known as *Vaiswadeva Homam* or *Viswa Homam*. After that is concluded he returns to the sanctum and proceeds to finish the *Puja*. The historically and traditionally important *Uppumanga* in Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar's famed coconut shell, presently gold covered for preservation, is offered now. *Kilikinnam* comprising a lunch menu of rice, curries, pickle and so on is also



submitted at this time. The *Mandapam* is swept, washed and cleaned thoroughly by the women under the supervision of the Kurup.

Once the purification is over the bell is rung and the Periya Santhi brings out the silver *Siveli* Idol of the God to the accompaniment of prescribed instrumental music and blowing of conch for the *Siveli* circumambulation. Sree Narasimha Swamy's Idol also joins in. The Nambi does one round of *Beli* for the various divinities at the *Beli* stones and at prescribed points inside the *Nalambalam* and in the outer areas. The two Idols proceed on their routes to be joined mid way by Sree Krishna Swamy's Idol. Only the Periya Santhies detailed to each of the three Deities can carry these Idols which are placed on their heads. Three other priests follow behind carrying an umbrella each over the Deities. After the three rounds are concluded as per norms the Idols are brought back to their shrines with the ringing of the bell and sounding of the conch. This procedure is called for each time the Deity leaves or enters the *Sreekovil*.

The public are now allowed to go up the *Ottakkal Mandapam* for prayer and worship for the first time during the day; till this time they could only stand down without touching it.

The Pushpanjali Swamiyar arrives by 6.00 a.m. after finishing his personal worship in the *Madhom*. He does a circumambulation prior to entering the *Cheruchuttu*. Before ascending the *Ottakkal Mandapam* a priest pours water on his feet. The Swamiyar enters the *Sreekovil*, *Dandu* in hand. The main *Pushpanjali* with its Vilvamangalam Swamiyar traditions starts now. The Swamiyar remains within till about. 8.00 a.m. On descending, he performs a brief *Pushpanjali* both at the Sree Narasimha and Sree Krishna shrines before proceeding to the *Swamiyar Madhom* where he resides.

Public entry into the main region of the Temple remains temporarily suspended from 7.15 to 8.30 a.m. due to the conduct of certain ceremonies. The daily worship of the Maharaja, who is in for a maximum of half an hour, is within this timeframe and his worship includes presentation of the administrative report of the previous day. The members of the Royal Family, when they come, worship just after the Maharaja. No one from his family is allowed to accompany him.

Immediately after the departure of the Valia Thampuran, the next set of *Nivedyas* is offered by the Nambi. Apart from the fare that accompanies all the offerings like *Kadali* (plantain). *Uppumanga* etc. the famous<sup>15</sup> *Ambalappuzha Palppayasam*, as it is popularly referred to, is then offered. *Meni Thulappayasam*, an exotic preparation of jaggery, rice, ghee, raisins, crystallised sugar and so on, which is a special offering done only on individual request and which does

15. *Sree Krishna Temple in Ambalappuzha, Alleppey District, is famous for its Palppayasam Nivedyam.*



not fall within the category of routine offerings, is also submitted during this time. Thereafter the public is allowed inside from 8.30 to 10 a.m. and from 10.30 to 11.45 noon.

With the time approaching for the *Ucha Puja* (noon worship) which is between 11.30 a.m. and 11.45 a.m., the inner areas remain out of bounds for the public from then onwards. The cleaning and purification of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* over, different stages of the *Ucha Puja* commence. The *Prasanna Puja* is conducted and *Nivedyam* consisting of *Unni Appam*, *Sarkara Payasam*, *Thrimadhuram* and *Uppumanga* is offered. Similar procedure of *Beli* and *Siveli* as was done after the *Ethirtu Puja* earlier, is followed now too. After the Idols are returned to their abodes and *Deeparadhana* carried out by the officiating Nambi with a simple camphor lamp, the public can mount the *Ottakkal Mandapam* till 12.00 noon. This time the procedure starts in the reverse order with the *Deeparadhana* at Thiru Ampati coming first followed by one at the *Thekkaidam* and lastly at the *Vadakkaidam* for Sree Padmanabha Swamy. People are permitted inside for the *Deeparadhana*. Depending on the number of devotees, extension of time is allowed so that none may return disappointed. Thereafter the two doors flanking the central ones are closed, and secured from inside by the Periya Santhi and lastly the middle ones are bolted and locked. The Nambi checks the doors and after satisfying himself, entrusts the keys to the Thirumeni Kaval Kurup on duty. Then after circumambulating the outer area, he retires to the *Nambi Madhom*.

The Thirumeni Kaval Kurup oversees the thorough washing out and cleaning of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* and adjacent areas as well as the front portion of Sree Narasimha Swamy's shrine. In Sree Krishna Swamy's shrine it is the duty of the Thiru Ampati Kurup to see to all these requirements. The imposing outer doors are closed by 1.00 p.m. It is now time for the afternoon rest of the Perumal.

When the four outer gates are opened at 4.00 p.m. people can enter the premises and move about in the long outer corridors or view the marvels in stone seen in the *Kulasekhara Mandapam*. The inner doors to the *Nalambalam* with the exception of the front eastern one which remains closed till 5.00 p.m. are now opened to facilitate the movement of the priests and other Temple staff. The Periya Santhi carries out duties similar to those of the morning. He inspects the flower garlands and flowers also, for the evening worship and takes them inside the sanctum, as he alone is authorised to do so.

The gold and silver *Deeparadhana* lamps for Sree Padmanabha Perumal and Sree Raghava Perumal are got ready. The Periya Santhi decorates Sree Raghava Perumal (Sree Rama Swamy) with the flowers kept outside that shrine for this purpose. It is now time for the Nambi to arrive. At 4.30 p.m. he reaches



the *Mandapam* and enters after ringing the gold bell outside the central door. He decorates the *Abhisheka* Idols while the *Siveli* Idol is decorated by the Periya Santhi. Sitting on a *Aavanappalaka* (oval wooden plank) seat facing north he conducts the *Pushpanjali* to the Deity. The Kurup is directed to throw open the doors for the public soon after 5.00 p.m. and *Darsanam* continues up to 6.00 p.m.

The Periya Santhi, who is in charge of the distribution of the *Prasadam* also, prepares the *Avil Nivedyam* (beaten rice and jaggery and grated coconut) for Sree Rama Swamy. After the *Cheruchuttu* is vacated by devotees by 6.00 p.m. the *Nivedyam* and *Deeparadhana* to Sree Rama Swamy are conducted by the Periya Santhi.

The sound of bells rising up ten minutes later acts as a the signal for the musicians who wait near the big *Kavara Vilakku* (huge standing lamp) on the east, to start playing. All is now set for the full-scale evening *Deeparadhana*. The auspicious time falls between 6.30 p.m. and 6.45 p.m. depending on the variations of sunset. Maximum crowd is experienced at that time as people cram the *Cheruchuttu* in the desire to get a glimpse of the glory of the ritual. None can touch the *Mandapam* then. The *Deeparadhana* starts with the seven tiered lamp which is lit for this worship by the Periya Santhi. The Nambi begins the ritual ringing the hand bell simultaneously. At that time Periya Santhi opens the middle door, to be followed by the door at the crown and the one at the holy feet. The other lamps are handed over to the Nambi one by one in the order laid down. As such, next comes the *Garuda Deepam*, followed by *Naga Deepam* five wick *Deepam* (*Pacha Thattu*) *Kumbha Deepam* and in culmination the *Karpooora Deepam* (camphor). This sublime display of light merging with the light of the Deity illumines the hearts of the devotees. *Ghattiyam* is recited thereafter. Devotees are allowed access to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* from then up to about 7.30 p.m.

The evening *Deeparadhana* is done first for Sree Padmanabha Swamy, soon after for Sree Narasimha Swamy and almost immediately for Sree Krishna Swamy as in the morning. While lamps of gold are used for Sree Padmanabha Swamy's *Deeparadhana*, for the other two main Deities, silver lamps are in service. In Thiru Ampati alone the *Naga Deepam* is not seen and in the place of seven-tiered lamp, a five-tiered one is used. Another *Etakka* player plays on the *Etakka* and sings the *Ashtapati* at Thiru Ampati from the time the doors close for preparations for the *Deeparadhana* and continues in the same condition till that ceremony is over. *Ashtapati* is sung before the noon and evening *Deeparadhas* in the main sanctum. More or less at the same time *Nivedyam* and *Deeparadhana* to Sastha, Kshetrapalan etc, take place.

After the public leave, the *Mandapam* is once more purified. *Athazha Puja* begins. *Nivedyam* is offered consisting of cooked white rice, *Aravanappayasam*



(jaggery, small dhal, rice and ghee), *Vatsan*, *Otta Ada*, *Avil*, *Unni Appam*, *Uppumanga*, *Kadali* and *Padatti*. Over and above the *Nivedyas* that are common for Sree Padmanabha Perumal and Sree Narasimha Moorthy, the latter Deity has an extra *Nivedyam* which is the *Panakam* offering. This *Panakam* is of a very special quality and kind the like of which is not seen elsewhere. Once more the routine purificatory rites are carried out. The *Beli* offering of the inner areas by the officiating Nambi, the inner circumambulation of the *Siveli* Idols by the designated Periya Santhies, their outer *Siveli* rounds and outer *Beli* by the Nambi are all the same as during the noon. Sree Krishna Swamy's participation too follows as before. The major difference is that for this night *Siveli* there is a *Deeparadhana* each at the eastern and western entrances followed by the recitation of the *Ghattiyam*. Only the officiating Nambi who is either the Periya Nambi or Panchagavyathu Nambi can perform the *Beli* rites and the *Deeparadhanas*, but if he is unable to do so, then the alternate Nambi has to substitute.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy complete three full rounds along the *Sivelippura* while Sree Krishna Swamy does only two and a half rounds, the route being different. *Pani* music is essential for the *Beli* rites and<sup>16</sup> each stage of this ritual is marked by the change in the tempo. Once the Deities arrive at the *Sivelippura* they are escorted by the *Nagaswaram* players.

The Idols return to their sanctums as per norms laid down. Sree Krishna Swamy's *Deeparadhana* is conducted first by the concerned Nambi. The Periya Santhi in charge then locks the doors of the sanctum while the outer doors are secured by the *Mathilakam* Guard<sup>17</sup> and the keys handed over to the special security of this Temple, the Thiru Ampati Kurup.

Sree Narasimha Swamy's *Deeparadhana* follows. The procedure is the same and the doors are bolted by the designated Periya Santhi of that shrine.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy's *Deeparadhana* comes last and is identified as the *Ardhayama Deeparadhana* (അർദ്ധയാമ ഡീപാരാധന). A simple *Nivedyam* is offered. Public entry is not allowed in the *Cheruchuttu* but people are permitted to worship standing on the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. By then, the two sets of keys of the other main shrines are brought by the Ampati Kurup and the Periya Santhi of Sree Narasimha Swamy and deposited in the care of the Thirumeni Kaval Kurup standing within the *Cheruchuttu*. Two Kurups are on duty at the same time all the twenty four hours inside the *Nalambalam* with allocation of duties within. Once the *Nivedyam* is over, the Kurup, lighted lamp in hand, goes up the *Ottakkal Mandapam*. Two Yogathil Potties out of the six take it in turns to attend this ritual but they are by and large represented by their two

16. Refer chapter 'Legends and Folklore'.

17. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple's guard.



nominees. They follow the Kurup on to the *Mandapam* and receive the *Prasadam* from the Nambi directly (The only other person to whom the Nambi gives *Prasadam* is the Maharaja).

The two side doors are secured from within by the officiating Periya Santhi who then bolts the central door. Tunes of soft and melodious strains of music from the *Kurunkuzhal* lull the Swamy to sleep.

The final locking up of the main *Sreekovil* is done in the presence of the Nambi, the two Yogathil Potties or their nominees and the Thirumeni Kaval Kurup who together stand witness that all is correct within and without. Then these keys too are handed over to the said Kaval Kurup.

A word about the security of this priceless heritage seems to be in order. All the twenty four hours, in rotation, two of the four Thirumeni Kaval Kurups are on duty. They are always present within the *Nalambalam*. The outer main gates and the areas lying outside the *Nalambalam* fall within the jurisdiction of the *Mathilakam* Guards who man the stationary and flying sentry posts. They comprise 46 men and one Guard Commander.

Thus the daily routine of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple concludes. The day's hustle and bustle over, peace and quiet pervade the atmosphere which now envelopes the area, as the silent, invisible sentinel of the Divine.

## Sub-shrines

This chapter will be incomplete if five more seats of Divinity present in this Temple outside the *Nalambalam* are not featured here. They are the Agrashala Ganapathy shrine, the *Thevaram*<sup>18</sup> of Maharaja Chithira Thirunal, the *Bhadradeepappura* as well as, Sree Dharma Sashta shrine and that of the Kshetrapalan.

## Sree Agrashala Ganapathy

This Ganapathy is found carved on the inner side of the eastern outer wall of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Since it was Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma who constructed these massive outer walls and who enhanced the quantum of free food distribution to awesome proportions, it is reasonable to conclude that this Ganapathy had His birth at that period of time. It is held that originally His role was supervisory and that He acted as a witness to the large-scale cooking that was being routinely done in the *Agrashala* where He resided. His grace was therefore solicited daily on this activity. The first food cooked would always be offered to the Ganapathy. The connected expenses were not included in the Temple's expenditure and even though the cooking was within the Temple premises, the administrative control was exercised by the Palace offices.

18. *Thevaram* – Personal Puja.



With the onset of many changes, the food distribution came to be greatly curtailed and the Palace funding also became strained. The staff of the Temple came forward in a grand gesture of devotion to the Agrashala Ganapathy, who had held sway for many, many years. From their personal resources they had a beautiful *Anki*,<sup>19</sup> ornaments in gold and all the necessary *Puja* vessels in silver made and they also met the running expenses for a period of time. The jewels are taken out and the Deity adorned on *Vinayaka Chathurthi*. The Ganapathy shrine is now a separate entity and very popular with devotees. The Temple presently runs this shrine as well but the expenses for the *Chathurthi* are still met by the staff as their tribute. One priest from either of the two *Desams* is appointed here and daily *Abhishekam*, *Puja* and *Nivedyam* are conducted. The recently introduced *Ganapathy Homam* offering is much in demand. The shrine remains open from 5.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. and from 5.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

### Thevaram of Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma

Following Sree Chithira Thirunal's onward journey after discarding his mortal form, a *Deva Prasnam* was conducted in the presence of the Tantries to ascertain what should be done with the personal *Puja* of this Maharaja. In obedience to the command from Sree Padmanabha Swamy as revealed in the *Prasnam*, this *Puja* was shifted into the premises of the Temple in 1992 itself. It operates on a separate footing and receives its share of veneration.

### Bhadradeepapura

Much has been already written about the *Bhadradeepam*, as such only what is happening at present is recorded. A Namboodiri priest representing the Tantri does the daily *Chakrabdja Puja* there. One Namboodiri or Potti and one Tamil Brahmin are fed each day. The priest does prayers on the ghee to be utilised in the *Sreekovil* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, which also forms part of his duties. The shrine is opened by 6.00 a.m. for a couple of hours and in the evening for preparing for the next morning. Every *Thiru Onam* day an ivory Vishnu Idol (with the two Devies) and *Salagramas* are brought here from the Palace for worship.

### Sree Dharmasastha shrine

In the *Kanni-moola* stands the age-old Sree Dharmasastha Temple with a rare *Swayambhu* sitting idol of the Deity in black stone. All the regular *Pujas* are conducted here but on the day of the *Mandala Puja* (41st day of the Sabarimala fast) for the annual *Chirappu* the whole place appears enchanting having traditional decorations with indigenous materials and an array of lamps.

---

19. *Outer replica of metal of the Idol.*



## Kshetrapalan shrine

This peaceful little shrine sits dreaming in the embrace of time. Its occupant, the Kshetrapalan, made of granite, is held to be one of the eight Bhairavas of Sree Parameswara. Again, the accent on unity in diversity surfaces here with one of the commanders of Siva's troops guarding a Vishnu temple. The routine worship is simple with only a lamp lit in the morning and evening and rice offered as *Nivedyam* both times. The deviation comes during the *Utsava* season when the *Beli* offerings to different divine potencies draws to a conclusion with the same being offered to the Kshetrapalan.

## Calendar of Events

The rites, rituals and events that take place in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are mainly four-fold, daily, monthly, twice yearly and annually. The exception to this rule is the *Murajapam* followed by the *Lakshadeepam* festival which takes place once in six years. Rituals are also conducted on a weekly basis, depending on Malayalam dates, star and *Thidhi*.

There is a wide graph of flexibility in the events of the Temple ranging from the extremely expensive sexennial *Lakshadeepam* to simple weekly events, while colour and pomp are reflected in certain others like the bi-annual *Utsavas*. They all aid in enhancing the attraction of the Temple in the minds of ordinary folk.

These functions of the Temple could have been divided into two till the time the new order came into being. They were either directly related to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which held good in the majority of the cases or were connected with the status of a ruler. Today the latter is not relevant but all those relating to the God continue.

## Monthly Events

In this section weekly, bi-monthly, and monthly events are included for the sake of convenience. The Malayalam calendar alone is followed.

For the Kshetrapalan on every Monday and for Sastha on every Saturday *Abhishekam* with gingelly oil, lighting of the outer encircling lamps and special offering of *Sarkara Payasam* are done. The older tradition regarding these offerings rested with the Kshetrapalan which was later on extended to Sastha as well.

*Muzhukkappu* (മുഴുക്കപ്പു) is an offering by which the Deities are coated with substances like butter thick sandal paste etc. and their features introduced on it. On the *Thiru Onam* star of every month, for Sree Padmanabha Swamy alone and on the asterisms of eight of the post-Marthanda Varma rulers and on the two monthly *Ekadesies*, this offering in sandal paste is done for all the



three Deities. For Sree Padmanabha Swamy alone this is done on the gold *Abhisheka Vighram*. An unusual aspect attracting attention is that on the *Ekadesi* when the moon is on the ascent Sree Krishna Swamy is decorated as the bewitching celestial damsel *Mohini*, with this sandal paste application. During the festive season *Muzhukkappu* is not done. When the star *Chithira* comes in between, instead of the *Muzhukkappu*, a garland of *Thulasi* leaves is submitted to Sree Narasimha Moorthy alone.

On the first of each Malayalam month, on the birth stars of many of the previous rulers after Marthanda Varma and on *Thiru Onam*, which is special to the Swamy, an extra sweet food – *Otta Thulappayasam* – is offered.

The impressive figures of the Ashtanaga Garuda and the two Dwarapalakas who guard the area of the flag mast are well oiled on every *Thiru Onam* to reduce the heat generated by their inner ferocity. On each *Thiru Onam* day two Brahmins are fed inside the *Nalambalam* by about 10.30 a.m.

On *Thiru Onam*, *Ekadesi* falling within the period when the moon is on the ascent and new moon day, the three Deities are more ornately decorated and taken for their routine night *Siveli* known as *Ponnum Siveli* in *Vahanas*. A difference exists even in these *Ponnum Sivelies*. On *Thiru Onam* alone the Deities travel in the *Ananta Vahanam* to the accompaniment of the *Mangala Vadyam*, a set of instruments producing auspicious music playing specified compositions of Sree Swathi Thirunal. These instruments consist of the flute, *Pambu Nadam* (snake pipe), *Kurunkuzhal* (short *Nagaswaram*) etc. On the other two nights of this special circumambulation, the *Simhasana Vahanam* is used.

The following functions and festivals in the diary of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, some bi-annual and others annual, are recorded here in order of the months of the Malayalam year, which is the prevailing system all over Kerala.

### Malayalam month Chingom (ചിങ്ങം) – Mid August to Mid September

The Malayalam year commences with the month of *Chingom* which dwells in the mind of the Malayalees as the golden month perhaps due to the fact that it contains many auspicious days including the *Onam* festival. It also heralds the end of the rainy season.

#### 1st of Chingom (ചിങ്ങം ഒന്ന് - ആണ്ടുപിറസ്സ്)

This is a day which attracts many to the doors of this Temple. All the main shrines are more elaborately decorated. Additional *Otta Thulappayasam* offering is made.



## Vinayaka Chathurthi (വിനായക ചതുർത്ഥി)

The event comes on the *Chathurthi*<sup>20</sup> *Thidhi* of the half month when the moon is on the ascent. Special *Nivedyas* and *Deeparadhana* are conducted for the silver Ganapathy idol in the Sree Rama shrine. A function known as *Chirappu* (ചിറപ്പു) which includes decorations and additional *Nivedyas* takes place for the Agrashala Ganapathy. The Maharaja worships here only on this day and receives the *Prasadam* and witnesses the *Deeparadhana*. This event has now become more elaborate and beautiful with an abundance of gleaming lighted lamps and profusion of flowers and other decorations. A noteworthy aspect of this *Chirappu* is that the expenses are met by the Temple staff and not by the Temple.

## Thiru Onam (തിരുവോണം)

This is one of the most important among the annual functions of the Temple by virtue of the fact that it is considered as the *Thirunal* (birthday) of Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram. When the immortal Omniscience is bestowed with physical attributes, a day signifying birth is assigned to that Divinity. The Temple celebrates this day in the manner laid down long ago.

Apart from the decorations and offerings honouring the day, the main ceremony is the submission of the *Palli Villu* (പള്ളി വില്ല്) to the three major Deities and to Sree Rama Swamy. The origin of this event appears elusive but no doubt it dates far back into the past. A record is introduced here for general interest.

The stage is set in the reign of Veera Iravi Iravi Varma.<sup>21</sup> The Temple *Churunas* in the Malayalam year 677ME/1502 AD record that orders were issued by the senior *Thiruvadi* of Thrippappoor to one carpenter, Putanangadi Kannalen Mathevan Kumaran Ashari, to make the bows to be submitted to Sree Padmanabha Perumal on *Thiru Onam* day falling on the 27th of *Chingom*.

It is a matter of gratification and significance that the descendants of this same family continue to execute this work as a hereditary duty and sacred trust to this day. They observe certain vows for this work as spelt out by tradition.

The bows are broad, flat, solid and made of wood. They are painted pillar-box red on one side and are in three sizes. The largest carries the *Anantasayanam* as the theme figure, the next in size has the full *Desavatharam* and the smallest of them all presents young Krishna's frolics. From the *Onam* of the year

20. 4th day of the lunar month.

21. 1. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 24, Ola 55.

2. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 1722, Ola 10.



1170 ME/1994 AD, one more pair of bows has been added with themes from the *Ramayanam*, the central scene being the *Pattabhishekam*.<sup>22</sup>

The *Ona Villu* submission is an elaborate ceremony annually conducted and is as follows:

The Sreekaryam and Thirumeni Kaval Kurups have to get the sanction from the Swamiyar to receive these bows for the Temple. Two members of this Ashari family (family of the craftsmen) bring them early morning on *Thiru Onam* day to the Temple and place them on a cloth in the *Natakashala Mukhappu*. Certain formalities observed, the Kurup then carries all the six bows in his hand and is ceremoniously escorted inside. After an inner circumambulation when he is accompanied by the Executive Officer and Temple staff related to the ritual, the bows are placed on the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. Silk threads in red with tassels are tied as bow strings along with strands of cadjan. The respective Nambies take the bows to decorate the *Moorthies*. As such the Periya/ Panchagavyathu Nambi assumes charge of the two big bows, the *Thekkaidathu* Nambi of the *Desavatharam* bows and the Thiru Ampati Nambi of the Krishna-leela bows. Till 1170 ME/1994 AD one bow of Sree Krishna Swamy was submitted to Sree Rama Swamy by the *Vadakkaidam* Periya Santhi; from then onwards, both the *Moorthies* have their own bows as explained earlier. These bows are placed inside the shrines and flank the respective *Moorthies* and are left thus from *Thiru Onam* till the *Ucha Puja* of *Chatayam* (ചതയം) which falls two days later.

On the auspicious day of *Thiru Onam* the Valia Thampuram goes to the Temple morning and evening and in the morning submits among other offerings a brocade (*Thiru Utayatayalam*) and a grand gold-laced Kerala *Mundu* (dhoti) along with a yellow *Thorthu* (small coarse cloth), which is exceedingly popular as a symbol of *Onam* all over the State. A *Mundu* tied in the yellow *Thorthu* is the traditional *Onam* gift of the Malayalees.

As has been mentioned earlier *Ponnum Siveli* takes place at night.

### Ashtami Rohini (അഷ്ടമി രോഹിണി)

In the month of *Chingom* on the auspicious day when the asterism *Rohini* and the *Thidhi Ashtami* coincide, Sree Krishna's birthday is joyously celebrated all over India. In this Temple special decorations and *Nivedyas* mark the day. The Temple opens early in the noon by 2.00 p.m. At 2.30 p.m. there is a milk *Abhishekam* for Sree Krishna which is beautiful to witness. Many people gather for worship then. An exquisitely decorated ivory cradle is put on the *Abhisravana Mandapam* and all the Krishna idols in the Temple are placed

22. The paintings of Sree Rama's bows have been executed by Sree Mummiyur Krishnakutty's disciples.



inside it. The Maharaja proceeds to the Temple both in the morning and the evening. A silver Krishna idol taken from the cradle is offered to him to which he pays homage.

### Uthrom (ഉത്രം)

An extra *Otta Thulappayasam* is submitted that day it being the birthday of Maharaja Uthrom Thirunal Marthanda Varma.

## Malayalam month Kanni – Mid September to Mid October Navaratri Puja (നവരാത്രി പൂജ)

In connection with the *Navaratri*<sup>23</sup> festival, Sree Saraswathi Amman is brought from Padmanabhapuram Palace (the earlier seat of the Travancore Kings) and worship traditionally carried out in the *Valia Kottaram* complex. *Siveli* with additional decoration of the Idols is conducted in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple for ten days. In the event of *Navaratri* coinciding with the *Alpashi* festival, as it sometimes happens, the routine morning circumambulation used to be conducted as *Alankara Siveli* when the Deities were attractively decorated with yellow *Javanthi* flower garlands (chrysanthemum). This *Siveli* is then conducted as normal *Siveli* after the evening *Deeparadhana* and before the regular *Utsava Siveli* at night. In case the two festivals fall separately, the night *Siveli* is conducted as usual.

The Tarananalloor Namboodiripads as the Tantries perform worship both morning and night inside the room where Sree Saraswathi Devi is kept during the days of the festival. Holy texts of cadjan leaves – *Granthas* – are also placed there. The Tantri's *Puja* is mainly to those *Granthas*.

### Maha Ganapathy Homam (മഹാഗണപതി ഹോമം)

This oblation is carried out in the *Homappura* adjacent to the *Bhadradeepappura* for twelve days starting two days before the commencement of the *Navaratri*. It is conducted by the Tantries. The rituals are fairly extensive in nature and the Namboodiripad commences the *Homam* by 5.00 a.m. every day. In the past, the number of coconuts utilised for this oblation amounted to over ten thousand. With changing times, due to financial pressures, the number had to be cut down to one thousand and eight after getting the required clearance from the Namboodiripads. The *Valia Thampuran* attends this worship daily.

Due to the fact that the Tantries are necessary for the *Navaratri Puja* and for the *Maha Ganapathy Homam* bringing the number of days to twenty two in the month of *Kanni* alone, this *Homam* is conducted simultaneously with the *Navaratri* in order to cut down on the days the Tantries have to be present here.

23. Festival very special to Devi (Goddess) which is spread over nine nights. It is kept up on an all-India level.



## Moolam (മൂലം)

Extra *Otta Thulappayasam* is offered as this day marks the birthday of Maharaja Moolam Thirunal.

## Malayalam Month Thulam – Mid October to Mid November Utsavam (ഉത്സവം)

Among the festivities in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the two *Utsavas* are by far the most colourful and expensive. Basically they continue in their original form braving the tornadoes of change and emerging triumphant. Certain unavoidable compromises have had to be regrettably accepted especially in the area of performing arts for more reasons than one but the religious character has been painstakingly preserved.

Festivals are believed to mark stages in the evolution of the temple they are connected with involving significant re-charging of the spiritual power. They also provide the concentration of the Divinity in an outward physical form for the common man to perceive and rejoice wherein religion and merry-making move hand in hand. The two *Utsavas* – *Alpashi* and *Painkuni* – as well as the rituals connected with them like the *Anujna*, *Mannuneer Koral* and *Kalasam* are biannual in character. The presence of the Tantries is inevitable for the actual festivals and some of the connected rituals which are exceedingly complicated and elaborate. The spiritual aspects apart, these festivals have the capacity to draw crowds in large numbers and contain within themselves many unique features.

Since the method of procedure is monthwise, the two festivals are taken separately though most factors hold good for both. *Alpashi* falls in *Thulam* and claims to be of more ancient vintage, operating totally as a great festival of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The different related events are presented in order of precedence.

## Alpashi Utsavam (അല്പശി ഉത്സവം)

### 1. Anujna (അനുജ്ഞ)

The function for according formal sanction to conduct the *Utsavam* is known as *Anujna*. It takes place on one of the three auspicious dates suggested by the Periya Nambi. The *Ettara Yogam* meets in session under the leadership of the Swamiyar for this purpose. The procedure is full of formalities and detailed directives. The permission that is sought here is to conduct the ten-day festival of the Perumal which starts with the flaghoisting under the asterism *Athom* (അത്തം) with the *Arat* falling under the asterism *Thiru Onam* (തിരുവോണം). The *Yogam* meets in the southern hall of the Thiru Ampati Krishna Swamy Temple under the authority of the Pushpanjali Swamiyar. The Yogathil Potties and the Karanatta Kurup are present as members of this council. Valia



Thampuran arrives at the usual time for worship and after a number of formalities, four separate communications signed by him with a gold *Narayam* (നാരായണം), a sharp pointed pen-like instrument, are read out in the *Yogam*. Later, in the presence of the Valia Thampuran permission is granted for the *Utsavam*.

## 2. Mannuneer Koral (മണ്ണുനീര് കോരൽ)

For the conduct of the *Dravya Kalasam* (ദ്രവ്യ കലശം) in connection with the *Utsavam*, a ceremony known as *Mulayital* (മുളയിടൽ) is performed. Sand and water required for it are brought from the pond of the Sree Mithranandapuram Temple.<sup>24</sup> The gold *Kutam* (pot) is taken from the *Ottakkal Mandapam* by the person delegated for it who is termed *Aazhati* (ആഴാതി) and carried by him on his shoulder in procession to the accompaniment of lamps, music and so on. A silk umbrella with glittering embellishments is held over the pot. The *Aazhati* goes under water still holding the pot of gold on his shoulder and collects in it sand and water from the bottom of the pond. Then the procession wends its way back to the Temple. The inner circumambulation over, the *Aazhati* heaps the wet sand on the *Thirunokku Mandapam* and returns the pot to the *Ottakkal Mandapam*. It is also his responsibility to get the sand from the ant hill, red sand, powdered cowdung etc. which are required for the next day's *Mulayital*.

The same pattern is followed for the second *Mulayital* function before the *Utsava Kalasam* with a change in time. The golden pot is taken out with all ceremony as detailed earlier, immediately after the flag is hoisted, signalling the commencement of the festival.

One interesting point is that the special phraseology common to Divinity and Royalty, as is the general rule is extended even when referring to objects used in worship. The procession of the gold pot is recorded as *Ezhunnallathu* - a term normally put to use when dealing with Gods and kings. In the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Perumal almost everything is coloured with such connotations.

## 3. Mula Puja and Kalasam (മുളപൂജയും കലശവും)

The sand brought by the *Aazhati* is shifted to the *Mulappura* (മുളപ്പുറം) near at hand and the powdered ingredients added to the same by the assistant priests. This prepared sand is deposited in special silver containers known as *Mulappalikas* (മുളപ്പാലികകൾ) The *Muladravyas* or seeds to be sprouted, are

24. The Mithranandapuram Tank was also famous as *Brahma Teertham*. Oral tradition has it that the bottom soil of this tank was known as *Panni Kutthiya Mannu* (പന്നി കുത്തിയ മണ്ണ്) or soil churned up by the pig. Pig is identified with *Varaham*, the third incarnation of *Vishnu*. Apart from historical links between the above Temple and Sree Padmanabha Temple, this may also be a reason for using this particular soil.



sown in them.<sup>25</sup> For five days running, morning and night, before the start of the actual *Utsavam* the Tantri (Namboodiripad) does the *Puja*, carries out purificatory rites and offers *Nivedyam* to these grains which will be later utilised for the *Kalasam*. This ceremony is done only for Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The concept prevails that it is from the eternal ambrosial attributes having their base in the lunar circle that life originates. The sprouts represent the moon and the *Palikas* (containers in silver), the lunar zone. The *Brahma Kalasam* containing within it the effulgence of the Divine, as well as the Supreme God-head embodied in the *Bimbam* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in Yogic trance, resting on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* after *Palli Vetta*, reaches up to the regions of the moon. It is believed that the Swamy rests in cosmic slumber on being fanned by the breezes which play on these sprouts. This is the significance of *Mulayital*.

*Kalasam* ceremonies are generally conducted with one of three aims in view for purification (ശുദ്ധ്യർത്ഥം), for festivals (ഉത്സവർത്ഥം) and for prosperity (സമൃദ്ധ്യർത്ഥം).

*Dravya Kalasam* which is purificatory in nature here, is conducted for the Perumal and the two Devies on the *Abhisravana Mandapam* from the third day to the fifth day (both inclusive) twice a day like for *Mula Puja*. The evening rituals are more lengthy. During the same time Sree Narasimha Swamy too has *Kalasam* which is performed directly on the main Idol itself by one among the Tantries.

On the morning of the sixth day which comes a day prior to the flag hoisting, the highly complex and sacred *Brahma Kalasam* is conducted by the Tantries. On the fifth night itself one gold *Karakam* which is like a *Kindi*<sup>26</sup> and of much spiritual significance and two hundred and seventy seven gold pots for Sree Padmanabha Perumal and eighty one gold pots for Sree Narasimha Swamy are filled with specified items, and placed on the northern *Vathil Madom*. Full ritualistic *Puja* is carried out for them by the Tantri. These pots which are encircled by the sprouted grains are thus left there overnight under tight security. They are guarded all through the night not only by the Kaval Kurups but also by the Brahmin aides on duty for this purpose and the *Mathilakam* Guards.

Next morning the Tantries perform *Puja* to these *Kalasas* again making the contents fully spiritually charged for the actual *Brahma Kalasam* ceremony to take place immediately thereafter. When the Periya Santhi lights the *Pani* lamp essential for all ceremonies relating directly to the Swamy, the Namboodiripad enters the sanctum, does *Puja*, invokes the potency of the God into the *Abhisheka*

25. They are horsegram, paddy, gingelly, country bean, red gram, barley, green gram, mustard, *Canjús Indicus* (കുറുശ്ശ), black gram, *Panicum Mitraceum* (ചാമ).

26. A typical Kerala vessel with a spout used for pouring water.



Idols and returns to the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. The three *Abhisheka* Idols and one *Siveli* Idol are brought by the Nambies and the Periya Santhi and placed on the silver platform kept for this purpose on the *Mandapam*. The Tantri finishes the worship prior to the *Kalasam* and then one by one the pots are emptied on all the four Idols by the Namboodiripad with *Mantras*. Ghee, milk, honey, curds, *Kashayam*<sup>27</sup> and water are of special significance among the commodities used for the *Brahma Kalasam*. After the Namboodiripad goes to the spot where the main *Kalasam* rests and does separate *Puja* to it, it is brought by the Nambi to the *Abhisravana Mandapam* and the *Abhishekam* carried out by the Tantri himself. Thereafter the Idols are well cleaned by the Nambi, grandly decorated and *Pujas* conducted to them once again by him. Throughout this procedure auspicious instrumental music and blowing of the *Shankhu* are employed. At the same time *Brahma Kalasam* for Sree Narasimha Moorthy takes place in the *Thekkaidathu* sanctum. One of the Tantries conducts it.

So far as the Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Swamy is concerned the entire run of *Kalasam* ceremonies up to and including *Brahma Kalasam* carried out for the other Deities for the prescribed number of days are condensed and performed with eighty one gold pots on the evening of the *Brahma Kalasam* and on the succeeding morning. That day the flag is hoisted announcing the commencement of the festival.

#### 4. Thiruvilakkam (തിരുവിളക്കം)

On the day of the *Thiruvilakkam*, the Valia Thampuran arrives only at 9.00 a.m. since the *Kalasa Pujas* have to give over. He gives a *Kacha* (cloth) and *Chotta* (small handled dagger) to each of the *Yogakkar* present. Then the Deities proceed round the sanctums inside the *Nalambalam* escorted by the Valia Thampuran with the *Udavaal* (sword) in hand. All the four Idols, the *Abhisheka Bimbam* of the two *Devies*, as well as the *Siveli Bimbam* of the *Perumal*, are then placed on the specially got-up low platform on the *Alankara Mandapam* with the beautifully decorated gold *Simhasana Vahanam* placed behind them. Only the two Nambies of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and as an exception the Thekkaidam Nambi and failing them, the Tantries, can carry the *Abhishekam* Idols while the Periya Santhi carries the Lord's *Siveli Bimbam*. To be specific the Periya Nambi carries Sree Padmanabha Perumal, Panchagavyathu Nambi and Thekkaidathu Nambi, Lakshmi and Bhoomi *Devies* and Periya Santhi of the Perumal the *Siveli Bimbam*. Once the *Deeparadhana* followed by the reciting of the *Ghattiyam* concludes, the Valia Thampuran leads the Idols into the *Cheruchuttu* and then they are returned to the *Sreekovil*. The historic sword is placed on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* from where it is taken inside the sanctum by the Nambi and returned for safe-keeping.

27. *Medicinal concoction.*



In the absence of the Valia Thampuran, the Yogathil Potti on whom rests responsibilities of execution of Temple matters, has to substitute. He is known as 'Kshetrakaryam Potti' (ക്ഷേത്രകാര്യംപോറ്റി).

The curtain does not ring down on the *Kalasam* ceremonies with the *Brahma Kalasam* and they will be presented as per sequence of events, later on.

## 5. Kotiettu (കൊടിയേറ്റ്)

The flags (*Koties*) used for this function are newly made for each festival. They are of red satin and in two sizes, the bigger one with a standing Garuda, hands folded as usual and the smaller one with Garuda in kneeling position, resting on one knee. The figures are drawn with white paint and are for Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy respectively. Thickly twined cotton thread ropes are made specially for this occasion.

On the day of the flag hoisting the ropes are tied to the flags along with bells and are handed over to the respective Nambies of the two Deities (Sree Narasimha Swamy does not have a flag as there is no separate flag mast for that shrine).

*Ethirtu Puja* over, the main flag is placed on a plate of gold filled with raw rice and brought to the lamplit front *Mandapam*. After the Tantri performs the *Koti Puja* (worship to the flag), it is carried by Sree Padmanabha Perumal's Nambi to the *Dhwaja Sthambham* to the company of *Thimila Pani*. He is preceded by the Tantri. As per norms spelt out, with the purificatory rites over, the flag is hoisted by the priests. Mango leaves, *Arasu* leaves and *Darbha* grass are tied round the mast at a specified elevation. It is an established wonder that as soon as the flag is hoisted, one *Krishnapparunthu* (kite) is seen circling above the mast for quite some time. It does not appear in like manner on any other day barring the two occasions of flag-hoisting.

The officers of the Temple and the Palace are expected to witness this function.

Hoisting of the flag is done in likewise manner at the Thiru Ampati also after the *Pujas* are performed there by the Tantri delegated for the said purpose. As noticed at other instances this shrine functioned as a temple within the Temple all along with its own *Belikkal* and *Dhwaja Sthambham*. Once upon a time its festival lasted for five days but by later royal decree in post-Marthanda Varma period, the days were increased to ten to be on par with those of the other Deities. Sree Krishna Swamy's festival now runs simultaneously with the others but is conducted separately and independently with regard to the rituals. While Sree Krishna participates in the processions, He has His own points of entry and exit and His own flag.



It was customary for the Valia Thampuran to submit two gold *Kutams* to the Perumal before the flag hoisting of each festival. Faced with changing times Sree Chithira Thirunal himself with deep regret was forced to discontinue this practice which he had faithfully adhered to for long, despite many odds, after consulting the proper religious authorities on the issue.

The festival is of ten days' duration culminating in the spectacular *Arat* procession. Festival *Kalastas* known as *Utsava Kalastas* take place in addition to the routine rituals. They are dealt with later on.

*Vahana Puja* is conducted to the *Vahanas* (vehicles) by the Tantri before the Idols are placed in them for the important *Sreebhootabeli* connected with the festival. This sacred ritual done only by the Tantries later on came to be known locally as *Siveli* (In this context it has to be noted that the daily *Siveli* is not to be misinterpreted as *Sreebhootabeli*).

## 6. Siveli (ശിവലി)

*Sivelies* are conducted twice a day, in the evening from 4.30 p.m. and at night from 8.30 p.m. Exception is on the first day when there is only night *Siveli*. Details of the *Palli Vetta* and *Arat* being subsequently dwelt upon, need no elaboration in the present context. On the days when there is *Ponnum Siveli*, it is conducted immediately after the evening *Siveli* is over. The Namboodiripads' presence is essential for the *Utsavas*.

On nine out of ten days of each festival, at the night *Siveli*, the Bhootam is given *Beli* or rice by a non-Brahmin assistant of the Temple after the Tantries finish the inner rituals. This is carried out at the *Peyadichan Mandapam* (the southwest *Unjal Mandapam*). On the *Arat* day alone this Bhootam is not given<sup>28</sup> food as a punishment for his past bad behaviour.

In the time of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, following the incident of an elephant getting out of hand, the practice of using elephants to carry the Idols was given up and *Vahanas* carried on the shoulder by a number of Potti priests became the order of the day. Six different kinds of beautiful conveyances are employed for these processions. They are the *Simhasana Vahanam*, *Ananta Vahanam*, *Kamala Vahanam*, *Pallakku Vahanam*, *Garuda Vahanam* and *Indra Vahanam*. Of them the *Pallakku*, and *Garuda Vahanas* repeat themselves, with the former being used twice and the latter four times, including for the long processions of *Vetta* and *Arat*. From certain records it is seen that earlier the *Pallakku* used to be taken for these processions but it would have been changed to *Garuda* in later years. While the enchanting *Indra Vahanam* is the heaviest and most cumbersome, the *Garuda* (considered to be the favourite conveyance of the Swamy) is the lightest and easiest to manage.

28. Refer chapter 'Legends and Folklore'.



The vehicles of Sree Padmanabha Swamy are gold while those of the other two Deities, silver. The different days on which the various *Vahanas* are taken out are listed as follows:

1. I st Utsavam – Simhasana Vahanam (Throne Vehicle)
2. II nd Utsavam – Ananta Vahanam (Serpent Vehicle)
3. III rd Utsavam – Kamala Vahanam (Lotus Vehicle)
4. IV th Utsavam – Pallakku Vahanam (Palanquin Vehicle)
5. V th Utsavam – Garuda Vahanam (Garuda-Bird Vehicle)
6. VI th Utsavam – Indra Vahanam (Eastern Gopuram-like Vehicle)
7. VII th Utsavam – Pallakku Vahanam (Palanquin Vehicle)
8. VIII th Utsavam – Garuda Vahanam (Garuda-Bird Vehicle)
9. IX th Utsavam – Garuda Vahanam (Garuda-Bird Vehicle)
10. X th Utsavam – Garuda Vahanam (Garuda-Bird Vehicle)

The *Vahanas* are enchanting to behold and lovingly cared for with necessary repairs and refurbishing done promptly. As mentioned earlier, Sree Padmanabha Swamy's vehicle is covered with designed and sculpted gold sheets while Sree Narasimha Swamy's and Sree Krishna Swamy's are silver covered. The number of Potties carrying the vehicles which are mounted on long and sturdy wooden poles varies according to the weight. Apart from the ornamentation, decorations with a profusion of flowers are resorted to. They are entirely executed by the priests as no one else can touch them. The work of beautifying is time consuming.

The eighth *Utsavam* has a special significance. It is the day of the *Valia Kanikka* when it is deemed most important for offering donations in money. For the night *Siveli* the Swamiyar also participates in the first round. His is the first *Kanikka* followed by *Valia Thampuram's*. Staff designated for the purpose circulates among the devotees with pots of gold to collect the offerings.

The following two days, which are the concluding days of the festival, merit extra description. For the people of this city and for tourists they have become a great attraction. *Arat* is a Government-declared half holiday for the city. Papers carry pictures and write-ups and the high quality Indian publications and foreign media have featured them, especially the *Arat*. These two processions represent an age-old tradition, taking one back on the time scale to another era. The pomp and pageantry and brilliant colouring of Royal Divinity are of enduring entrancement.

In the words of J.H. Cousins, "*The two processions are two phases of one transaction that is full of universal truth expressed with impressive art.*"<sup>29</sup> *Vetta and Arat are perhaps the most exoteric in symbolising spectacularly the triumph*

29. J.H. Cousins – 'The Arts and Crafts of Kerala'.



*of good over evil, the extirpation of that which obstructs the spiritual life and the attainment of purification and peace through the destruction of passions. And if the temple is a representation of the cosmos, such ceremonials, carried out through the art of symbolical presentation, anticipate the final withdrawal of the external universe into the being of Brahma."*<sup>30</sup>

The difference in the *Garuda Vahanam* used for the *Vetta* and the *Arat* lies in that fact that an *Anki* of the Lord is utilised on those two days wherein Sree Padmanabha Swamy carries a bow and arrow as He readies Himself for the hunt.

## 7. The Ninth day – Palli Vetta (പള്ളിവേട്ട)

*Palli Vetta* signifies a royal hunt. As the Ruler of the land, Swamy ventures forth to hunt down and annihilate all the ills and wrongs of His domain which are represented by a coconut, painted green. A mock forest is fabricated in the middle of the public road near the Sree Vettakkorumakan Temple where two hundred odd years back, an unsuccessful bid was made on Maharaja Marthanda Varma's life. The coconut is placed in this forest. The route the Deities take is washed and cleaned and white sand spread. The routine night *Siveli* having been concluded, by about 8.30 p.m. the conch is sounded as a signal for the *Vahanas* to move out for the hunt. The Deities take the Western *Nata* and without a sound (in what could be described as one of the rare silent religious processions) move out and finally enter through the Northern *Nata*, passing *Thevarathu Koyikkal* (which used to be the official residence of the ladies of the Travancore Royal Family) on the way and halting for the actual *Vetta* ceremony a little ahead.

Apart from the Valia Thampuran who is ceremoniously attired and who carries the *Udavaal* of *Thrippati Danam* fame in his hand, all the male members of his family who are armed, representatives of other Kshathriya clans, officers of the Temple and the Palace and other dignitaries escort the Deities. Men representing the old Travancore armed forces of the infantry, cavalry, artillery, spear-men etc, flag bearers of the State, Nair war-lords with swords and shields, non-official Palace staff all in distinctive traditional attire add to the grandeur and colour of the procession. Mounted police and police on foot are also present. The flares of fire from the lamps lighted from iron rod-like torches enhance the special effect.

The Temple elephant goes first, the occasional clanking of its chains being the only sound. Gaily coloured Temple flags of varying shapes sporting Vaishnavite emblems come next to be followed by other participants (including Hindu officials of the Government). All of them walk on either side of the

30. K.R. Vaidyanathan, 'Temples and Legends of Kerala'. (with reference to Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple).



road. The Maharaja, on the other hand, walks in the middle and behind him to his left, in order of precedence move the male members of his family as well as the *Koil Thampurans* (aristocrats who have married into the family). Temple musicians noiselessly follow. At a little distance the Tantri is seen walking in the middle and right behind him are the three profusely decked *Garuda Vahanas* of Sree Padmanabha Perumal in the centre flanked by Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy on the right and left respectively, carried on the shoulders of many priests. The Nambi and the Executive Officer also walk close by on two sides near the Deities. A good number of extra priests who take turns to shoulder the long, heavy poles on which these *Vahanas* are mounted, aggregate behind these conveyances. Lastly, a little away behind the *Vahanas* come the women staff of the Temple dressed in traditional pristine white Kerala attire, carrying lighted lamps in their hands.

The designated individual known as *Anavaal* is waiting at the appointed place of the hunt, bow and arrow in hand. The procession halts and the Valia Thampuran reaches this area and waits for the Tantri who is led there by an attendant with a lighted lamp. The attendant transfers the bow and arrow to the Tantri who has by then conducted *Beli*, taking care not to touch the Tantri in any manner. Likewise the Tantri gives the bow and arrow to the Valia Thampuran after inducting divine charges into them, with the Deities as witness. As Sree Padmanabha Dasa who is the executant of Divine will, after praying to Him, the Maharaja shoots an arrow into the coconut. The *Palli Vetta* is over and all is well in the domain of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Till then the procession has been moving in total silence as the purpose was a hunt. The moment the arrow pierces the coconut, the *Sankhu* is sounded. Simultaneously the *Nagaswaram* and other music erupt into the atmosphere in an explosion of joy proclaiming that ills have been done away with. The procession then wends its way back to the Temple taking the Northern entrance.

In the meantime, the watching crowds race to the mock forest of *Elanji* (Mimsfot) branches and within a matter of minutes the entire area is denuded of branches as it is believed that a leaf from this forest is most auspicious and lucky. The leaf or leaves are reverentially preserved till the next *Vetta* by those fortunate enough to get them.

Once the Deities re-enter the Temple, an inner round of the *Sivelippura* is executed and at a particular juncture Sree Krishna Swamy leaves the procession to be taken back to His shrine in the Thiru Ampati, where He retires to rest once the purificatory rites by the Tantri draw to an end. His *Garuda Vahanam* is kept secure in a separate room near this Temple.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy complete the round, accept the *Deeparadhana* performed to them at the flag mast, complete one



inner circle and are ceremoniously escorted to the *Alankara Mandapam*. The Idols are removed from the *Vahanas* and while Sree Narasimha Swamy's *Bimbam* is taken to His *Sreekovil* after prescribed rites to rest on a satin bed complete with pillows, Sree Padmanabha Swamy's *Bimbam* moves to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* which has been converted into a chamber for Him to rest for that night, with satin bed, pillows, hand fans (പീശിരകൾ) and lamps offering subdued light. The two *Garuda Vahanas* of these Deities are also kept on this *Mandapam*. The coconut and arrow are brought along with the procession and after the Tantri does *Puja* to them along with the sprouted grains in their *Mulappalikas* (മുള പാലികകൾ), they are also placed there. Till the next morning there is special all-night security guarding that area.

## 8. The Tenth Day – Arat (ആറാട്ട്)

The *Arat* continues to be a grand, eventful day in the diary of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Unlike the normal days, the doors of the *Sreekovil* are opened for the first time, on the tenth *Utsavam*, in the *Sreekovil* presence of the Valia Thampuran, who arrives in the Temple by 5.00 a.m. The Tantri would have already concluded the purificatory rites at both the shrines by then. A milking cow and a calf are brought near to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* for submission to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by the Valia Thampuran. Turmeric is powdered inside the *Cheruchuttu* by women designated for the purpose, in his presence. The turmeric powder is showered on the Deities and after certain rituals the two *Utsava Bimbam*s are returned to their respective *Sreekovils*. More turmeric is powdered and kept ready for use in the functions connected with the actual *Arat* ceremony of that evening. The Valia Thampuran returns after these morning rituals give over. Routine worship is resumed thereafter.

On the evening of the tenth day, before the commencement of the *Arat* procession, very many formalities have to be complied with. After the *Puja* inside the *Sreekovil*, the *Beli* in the inner regions and *Vahana Puja* all conducted by the Tantries, they move on to the outer areas for offering of *Beli* to the other divinities. The *Yogakkar* are already present by then inside the *Nalambalam* and have been given *Prasadam* by the Periya Nambi and Periya Santhi. At the appointed time the Periya Santhies designated to each *Moorthy* bring out the *Utsava Bimbam* and secure the same on the elaborately decorated *Garuda Vahanas* awaiting them on the *Alankara Mandapam*. The *Udavaal* as well as the big knives for the *Yogakkar* is brought from inside the sanctum by the Periya Nambi where they had been placed previously. The procedure for *Thiruvilakkam* is followed except that the Idols are now seated in their *Vahanas*. The Valia Thampuran takes the *Udavaal* at the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. *Deeparadhana* is performed there and then the Valia Thampuran waits at his usual place outside the *Sivelippura* for the *Vahanas* to emerge after their inner round. Routine *Deeparadhana* at the Eastern *Nata* over, the regular *Siveli* begins.



As against the normal procedure the Valia Thampuran does not join in but waits at the *Chempakathumoottu Nata* till two rounds are over. When the three vehicles reach the Eastern *Nata* in the second round, after certain traditional norms are followed, he rejoins the procession and it moves on to the Western *Nata* through which it leaves the Temple premises. The male members of the family array outside with swords and shields, to accompany the procession.<sup>31</sup>

The *Arat* procession slowly moves out with an abundance of pomp and pageantry, colour and music, with all emblems and insignia of total royalty, reliving history and heritage. Elephants carrying the flag and howdahs, decorated with all trappings of royal beasts, head the procession. The dark green serrated flag which once flew high representing the power of Tippu Sultan of Mysore and which was captured by the Travancore Army, is taken out in triumph during the festival. All the traditional participants of the *Vetta* procession as well as special invitees, officers and police, the instrumentalists of the Temple and the band take part. Music spiralling from the different sets of musicians reach up to the skies glorying the grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Behind them the Temple officers and priests move close to the *Vahanas*. Women staff and the maximum employees of the Temple accompany their Master.

On the elephant back are seen Deities from other Temples who celebrate their own *Arats* that day. They also not only return with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy but do an inner circumambulation of the *Sivelippura* before proceeding to their own places. For the *Alpashi*, the participating Temples are Thiruvallom (where the Lord's head rested initially before He shrank in size), Sree Cheriya Udayaneswaram, Sree Vadivethu Kshetram and the Devi Sree Arakothu Temple.

As the *Vahanas* move out of the Fort walls Sree Padmanabha Perumal is presented with the twenty one gun salute,<sup>32</sup> reserved for the ruler of the land. Almost half way to the beach there is a granite *Mandapam* known as the *Karikku Mandapam* where the *Vahanas* would be lowered for a brief spell. Ramayyan Dalava, the famous Dewan to Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, had requested that a special place be provided for his family to worship the Swamy during the *Arat* procession. Accordingly permission was granted to them to stand by this *Mandapam*, and offer *Karikku*, (tender coconuts) bananas etc., to the Deities. The descendants of his family continue to enjoy the privilege.

31. Only those members who have had the *Upanayanam* ceremony carry swords and shields; the younger princes who have yet to be invested with the holy thread carry daggers in their hands.

32. It is customary for the guns to be fired the specified number of times when the King leaves the Fort area. With *Thrippati Danam* full rulership became vested in Sree Padmanabha Swamy. As such from then the guns were fired only as He emerged from the Fort and not for the Maharaja. Travancore had enjoyed 21 gun salutes for long, till the time of Sree Moolam Thirunal, when it was reduced to 19 for 'insufficient war effort' during World War I.



The procession reaches the beach. From the Temple right up to the beach, on either side of the *Arat* route people line up, irrespective of religion and other differences to witness this grand festival. It is a festival of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and also a festival of this city and its people.

One aspect that merits special mention is that despite changing religious climate at times, the welcome and respect accorded to this procession both times, by the Muslims of the Vallakkadavu area through which it makes its way, have been a constant factor.

The *Vahanas* are brought to rest in the granite *Arat Mandapam* near the *Shankhu Teerthakkara*. The Idols have *Punyaham* (purificatory rites) and *Puja* performed to them by the Tantries. They are taken off from the *Vahanas* and carried by the three Periya Santhies of the Deities to the sea accompanied by the Periya Nambi, Thekkaidathu Nambi and Thiru Ampati Nambi as well as the Tantri. The Valia Thampuram also participates. As they pass through the two lines of the police force, the Royal Salute is presented to the Deities.

The three Nambies with the *Bimbas* and the Tantri with the *Sankhu* are encircled in the sea by a ring of priests. On the outer periphery two fishing boats provided by the traditional fisher families ply the waves.<sup>33</sup> Sri Miranda, who is now seventy eight years old, hails from one of those families and takes the responsibility of sending the boats out during *Arat*.<sup>34</sup> Originally present for the safety of the King's person, they now continue for the general security as well as for specific help if needed, especially with regard to the *Bimbas*. Each Nambi goes under the waves for the holy dip, the Idol close to his chest and held secure by the ring of Potties round him. It is the same for the Tantri who immerses himself at that identical time and comes up collecting some sea water in his sacred conch. The sea is believed to attain the sanctity of a great *Teertham* during the immersion and many devotees also bathe in the ocean at that time. A conch is blown and *Thimila Pani* played during the important times.

This immersion in the sea is the actual *Arat* ceremony of the Deities of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and is the process of purification deemed necessary due to the *Vetta* (hunt) of the previous night.

The Tantri pours the sanctified water from the *Sankhu* into the Valia Thampuram's hand as *Teertham*. The Idols are placed on a specially made raised sand bank and turmeric powder scattered on them and *Puja* performed

33. A plot to assassinate Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma during the *Arat* somehow filtered through to the fisherfolk of Shanghumukhom who arrayed themselves on the waters in defence. Thus so the plan was foiled. The Maharaja in gratitude gave them certain rights and privileges and gifts from the Temple. Their descendants continue to provide a watch and ward on the waves for each *Arat* ceremony.

34. A few years after this book was initially released this grand old man breathed his last.



by the Tantri.<sup>35</sup> Twice more this process of *Arat* and all other rituals are repeated. At the same time *Arat* for the accompanying Deities from other Temples are performed by the concerned priests.

The Valia Thampuran who escorts the Deities back to the *Arat Mandapam* retires to the nearby *Arat Palace*. The Tantri does *Puja* and offers *Nivedyam* to these *Bimbas*, which are placed on a separate platform.

By about 8.15 p.m., time nears for the procession to start back. On being informed, Valia Thampuran arrives and stands outside the *Mandapam* for the *Deeparadhana* on the beach. The muted roar of waves forms a background and these waves appear as though they are murmuring incessant hymns of praise of the Lord. The Idols have been already placed in their *Garuda Vahanas* in readiness to move on. After the routine sprinkling with rose-water, the Periya Nambi performs the *Deeparadhana* which is followed by *Ghattiyam* recitation. Thereafter Valia Thampuran proceeds to worship the Deities of the other Temples and then returns to the Fort by car to await the arrival of the *Moorthies*. Immediately after he leaves the beach front, the entire procession ceremoniously starts back. Since darkness has enveloped the firmament many a lighted flare illumines the return route giving rise to the impression from afar, of fire-blossom garlands decorating the Perumal's path. This procession takes place with adequate security under the direct charge of the Executive Officer of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

As Sree Padmanabha Swamy re-enters the imposing walled area of the Fort, once again the thunder of the twenty one guns booms in salute. Valia Thampuran receives the *Vahanas* at the appointed place and accompanies them back into the Temple through the Western *Nata*. Once the Eastern *Nata* is reached he leaves the procession and waits at a spot near the *Natacashala Mukhappu* for the completion of the balance of the three rounds. Before the third round is over, Sree Krishna Swamy returns via His own route to His Temple. The other two *Vahanas* reach the flag mast and the Valia Thampuran rejoins them. Another highly significant function of the festival now takes place. The Namboodiripad (Tantri) offers *Nivedyam* to the *Dhwaja Sihambham* and the flag is symbolically lowered by drawing out *Darbha* tied round it when the flag was hoisted ten days back. This act signals the conclusion of the *Utsavam*.

*Deeparadhana* is performed to the two Deities and they move inside with the Valia Thampuran leading the way. The *Vahanas* are placed on the *Alankara Mandapam* and the Deities are returned to their respective shrines after one inner circumambulation. Then the Valia Thampuran places the *Udavaal* on the inverted gold plate kept on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* followed by the *Yogakkar* who also keep their long knives nearby. The Periya Nambi collects them and

35. Among other things turmeric possesses antiseptic value.



takes them inside the sanctums to be returned thereafter. On worshipping all the shrines inside the *Nalambalam* as usual, Valia Thampuram moves on to the Thiru Ampati where routine rites are concluded by the Tantri and the flag is symbolically lowered. He enters Thiru Ampati where the *Siveli Bimbam* has already been replaced and after worship there, returns to the Palace.

The remaining routine functions are then carried out and the sanctum doors close for the night after a full day of action and activity.

One important point to be noted with regard to the *Alpashi Utsavam* is that it is calculated ten days backwards from *Arat* which has to fall under the asterism of *Thiru Onam*. As such, at times due to variations of stars, the *Kotiettu* for the *Alpashi Utsavam* comes in late *Kanni* so that the *Arat* would be on the asterism *Thiru Onam* in early *Thulam*.

## 9. Dravya Kalasam during the Utsavam (ദ്രവ്യകലശം)

The remaining vital aspect connected with the *Utsavam* is conduct of *Kalasis*. The pre-*Utsava Dravya Kalasis* have already been detailed, the rest are being presented here collectively.

*Dravya Kalasam* during the *Utsavam* takes place daily from the second day of the festival up to and including the ninth day after the *Ethirtu Puja* and during *Ucha Puja*. They are conducted on the *Abhisravana Mandapam* for Sree Padmanabha Swamy's two *Bimbis* and for the two *Devies* using eighty one gold pots. Sree Narasimha Swamy has no separate *Kalasam*. Thiru Ampati has *Navakam* (*Kalasam* with nine pots) performed daily all these days, once more underlining its separate status as a Temple. These *Kalasis* conducted for *Utsavas* (ഉത്സവ കലശം) are referred to as *Utsava Kalasis* in a general manner of speech.

On the day succeeding the *Arat*, the Tantries conduct the *Arat Kalasis* termed *Valia Kalasis* at all the three main shrines. For Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy, eighty one pots each and for Sree Krishna, twenty five pots are used. This lasts for only one day. For the completion of the festival this *Kalasam* is unavoidable. That night the Namboodiripads carry out *Sreebhootabeli* as well.

While the elaboration on the other rituals performed in connection with the *Utsavas* starting with the *Dravya Kalasis* and proceeding right through to the *Arat Kalasam* is being avoided due to their complex and private nature, *Homas* conducted then are merely being touched upon to underline the weighty ritualistic superstructure operational in this Temple. They take place on fourteen days and exhibit differences in character, number and timing. By way of example are mentioned the six *Prayaschita Homas* taking place in the forenoon



on the third day of the *Dravya Kalasam* or the two kinds of *Homas*, one in the morning and another in the evening on the fifth day of the *Dravya Kalasam*. They offer a total number of twenty six.

Except for the difference in stars this same procedure is repeated during the second *Utsavam* in the Malayalam month of *Meenom*, six months hence.

### Malayalam Month Vrischikom – Mid November to Mid December Vrischika Chirappu (വൃശ്ചികചിരപ്പ്)

Starting from the first of this Malayalam month, for 52 days running, along with the *Athazha Puja* (അത്താഴപൂജ) special *Nivedyas* consisting of tender coconut, puffed rice, betel leaf, arecanut and *Appam* are offered to the Deity. Thereafter the *Athazha Siveli* is conducted for Sree Padmanabha Swamy. On the days when there is *Ponnum Siveli*, this *Chirappu* does not take place. In that case, leaving aside these days it has to be conducted for a total of 52 days.

### Thrikkarthika (തൃക്കാർത്തിക)

On this day side by side with the *Nivedyas* for the *Ucha Puja* (ഉച്ചപൂജ) underground tubers of the *Dioscoria* family are also prepared and offered.

### Malayalam Month Dhanu – Mid December to Mid January Thiruppizhinji (തിരുപ്പിഴിഞ്ഞി)

Every morning during the entire length of this month a separate *Nivedyam* of *Pongal*, rice cooked with certain ingredients (popular in Tamil Nadu) is offered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and to the other two main Deities.

### Swargavathil Ekadesi (സ്വർഗ്ഗവാതിൽ ഏകാദശി)

This is an extremely important day for worshippers of Maha Vishnu all over India. In the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple it is the occasion which draws huge crowds of devotees. The Temple opens earlier than usual in the morning by 3.00 a.m. and in the evening public gain entry by 3.00 p.m., which is two hours earlier than usual. Still long queues form all round the massive *Sivelippura* awaiting *Darsanam* of the God. Careful arrangements are made by the Temple authorities to meet the heavy rush.

It is a widely prevalent belief among the Hindus that to die on this particular *Ekadesi* of *Dhanu* and to be cremated the next day which is *Dvadesi* ensures a passport to *Swargam* (Heaven), the doors of which remain open on this *Ekadesi* (The name lends itself to this conviction).

*Swargavathil Ekadesi* falls on the eleventh day during that half of the month when the moon is on the ascent. There are special *Nivedyas*, decorations and *Siveli* in which the Valia Thampuran also participates, to mark the day. From the time the Idols are taken inside the *Sreekovil* after *Abhishekam* and



*Deeparadhana* till the time the sanctum doors close in the noon and from 3.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m., apart from certain intermissions necessitated by rituals, people are allowed on top of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* for getting close *Darsanam* of the Swamy.

After the evening *Deeparadhana* and *Athazha Puja*, the Valia Thampuran arrives in the Temple for the ritual known as crossing the *Swargavathil* and thereafter for participating in the night *Siveli*. The two *Simhasana Vahanas* on which the *Siveli Bimbas* are taken for the night *Siveli* are decorated and kept in readiness by then on the *Alankara Mandapam*. The outside area of the Northern entrance to the *Cheruchuttu* and the inner top portion of the *Thiruvolakka Mandapam* are made grand by the covering of red *Pattu* (silk) and embellished with flower garlands, plantain bunches, tender coconut clusters etc. which all form part of traditional items of decoration. The entire Temple is lamp-lit and the *Nalambalam* area is so entrancing that it really makes one gain the impression of being in *Swargam*. The Valia Thampuran goes round the sanctum and waits by the *Cheruchuttu* doorway at the north. Immediately these doors, which have been kept closed open to reveal the Periya Santhi standing inside facing north carrying in his hands the *Siveli Bimbam* of Sree Padmanabha Perumal with other priests assembled behind. In what could be couched as a soul-stirring vision, the Periya Nambi conducts the *Deeparadhana* to the Swamy. Thereafter the Valia Thampuran accompanied by the family members goes round and enters the *Cheruchuttu* through the southern doorway and leaves this area through the now open northern doorway which is known as the *Swargavathil*, symbolically crossing the gateway of Heaven. The Palace musicians called *Mullamoottu Bhagavathars* sit on the *Thiruvolakku Mandapam* and render musical compositions of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal in praise of the supreme God.

The Valia Thampuran goes by the prescribed route to the place near the *Natakashala* to await the arrival of the Idols. They are taken for an inner circumambulation and are placed in the *Vahanas* and brought out to the eastern *Sivelippura* for the special night *Siveli*.

After it concludes, the routine daily rituals take place as usual and the doors of the Temple close for the night.

### Thiruvathira (തിരുവതിര)

On this day *Abhishekam* is performed to Kshetrapalan with gingelly oil and special *Puja* conducted. That evening it is customary to offer *Nivedyas* like *Appam*, *Malar* and so on. It is interesting to note that, that day is observed as the birthday of Lord Siva when the asterism is *Thiruvathira* in *Dhanu*. Kshetrapalan is endowed with Saivite nature being deemed to be a Siva Bhootam and the fact that he has offerings specially made to him that day underlines this stand.



## Bhadradeepam (ഭദ്രദീപം)

It is said that the first legendary *Bhadradeepam* took place as an isolated instance under the initiative of the Kshatriya King Karthaveeryarjuna. The next known *Bhadradeepam* is seen to have been conducted by Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma in the same manner as of yore. Maybe this is due to the fact that the Kola Swaroopam from which many an adoption has taken place into the Travancore Royal Family claims inheritance from the dynasty of Karthaveeryarjuna. No dynasty has had the distinction of continuity of conduct of the *Bhadradeepam* other than the Travancore Dynasty. Even King Karthaveeryarjunan's descendants are not seen to have carried on this tradition. This *Yajnam* (elaborate ritual) of tremendous sanctity conducted by the kings is aimed at achieving liberation from the multifarious miseries besieging the land and for its prosperity and progress as well as for the welfare of the King. It was decided upon after consulting Brahmin scholars of Malabar, Thirunelveli and Madurai who were asked to research into the *Vedas* to discover an optimum form of prayer. As such, according to the Tantries, this cannot be strictly interpreted as a Temple ritual. But it is only in consonance with the character of royalty which had become absolute with the *Thrippati Danam* of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, that such a meaningful ceremony was solemnized in the 'Abode of the Supreme Monarch'.

The periodicity of the *Bhadradeepam* is once in six months and the twelfth *Bhadradeepam* culminates in the *Lakshadeepam* which is on the fifty sixth day of the *Murajapam* involving cyclic rotation of prayer.

*Bhadradeepam* used to be conducted in a separate building situated on the southern side of the Temple grounds outside, the *Sivelippura*. This structure goes by the name of *Deepayaga Mandapam* or *Bhadradeepappura*. It took place twice a year before the two solstices in mid January (Malayalam month *Dhanu*) and mid July (Malayalam month *Mithunam*), for a duration of seven days to conclude on the first of the succeeding months of *Makaram* and *Karkkatakam* respectively. (The beginning of the Malayalam month coincides with the middle of English month).

The first *Bhadradeepam* took place in the year 919 ME/1744 AD and the first *Lakshadeepam* of 925 ME/1750 AD just five days before the *Thrippati Danam*. The significant rites of the complex *Bhadradeepam* would be conducted only by the Tarananalloor Tantries. The involvement of many of the prominent Namboodiri families is also on record. This function took place in the *Bhadradeepappura* erected on an area of special potency. (Refer chapter *The Inner Radiance*).

Simultaneously with the *Bhadradeepam* which was not only for the land and people but to a large measure for the king as well and which was conducted outside the *Sivelippura*, the sacred ritual known as *Kalabham* for the Deity would be performed by the Tantries inside the Temple. It is only logical to





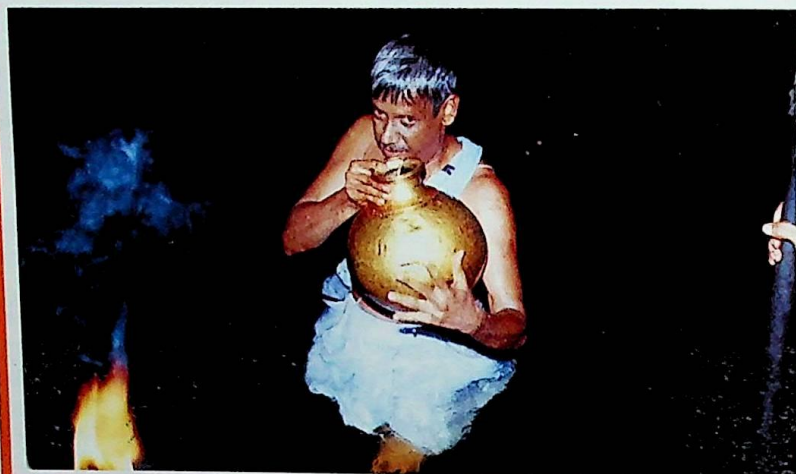
Nirayum Puthariyum







Kurumkuzhal



Mannuneer Koral



Kamala Vahanam in  
Seeveli Procession



Palli Vettah

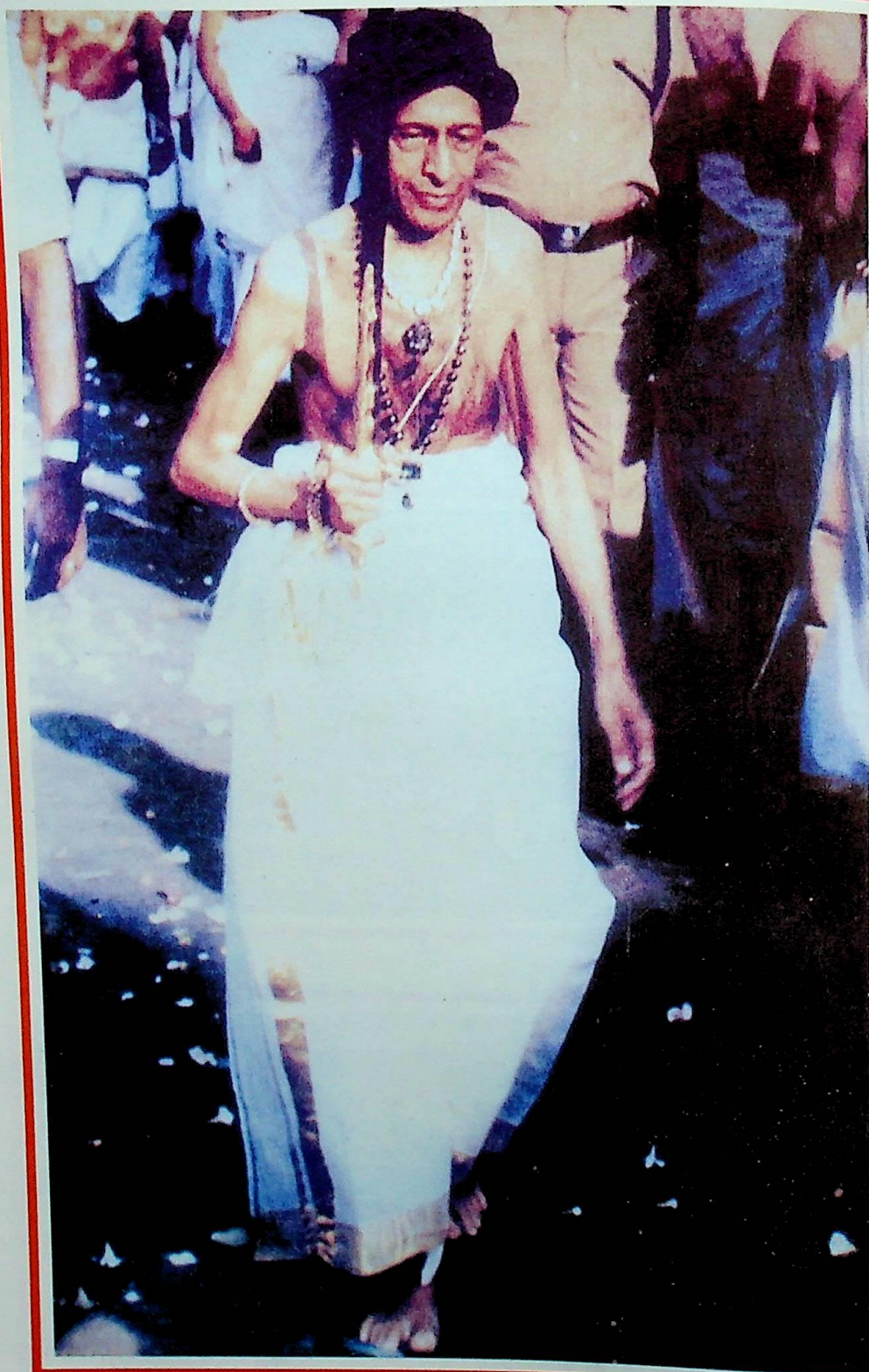


Vahanam  
returning after  
Palli Vettah

The Temple flags  
preceding  
the Arat procession







Maharaja Chithira Thirunal accompanying the Arat procession

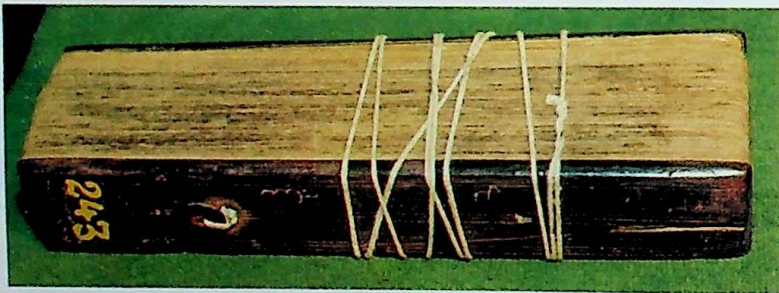




Arat Procession



Tarananalloor Padmanabha  
Padmanabharu Namboodiripad

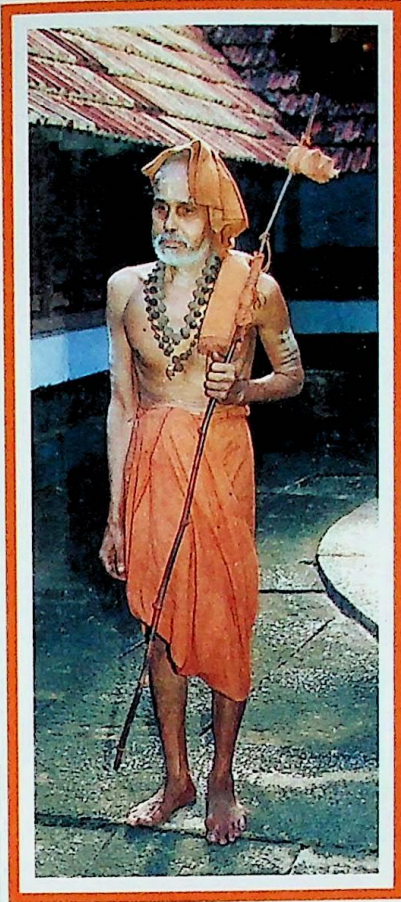


Grantham  
of the Tantries

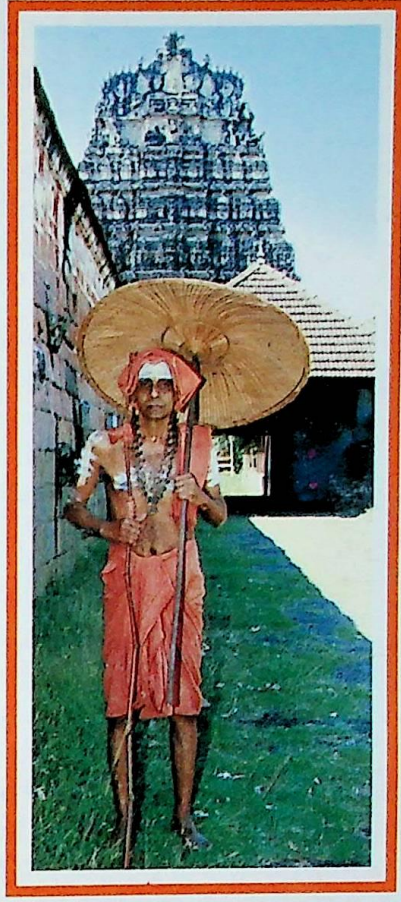
The Present  
Tarananalloor  
Tantries of  
the Temple



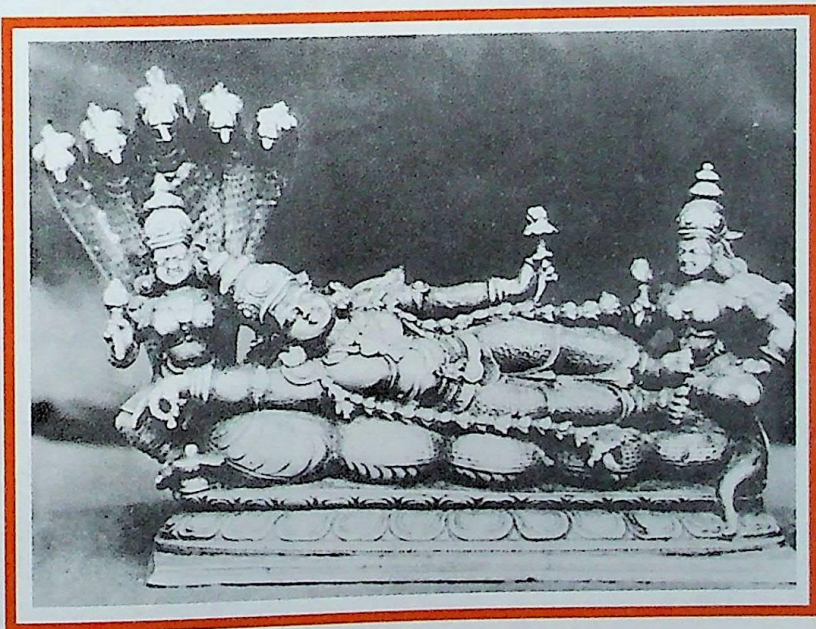




Naduvil Madham Pushpanjali Swamiyar



Munchira Madham Pushpanjali Swamiyar

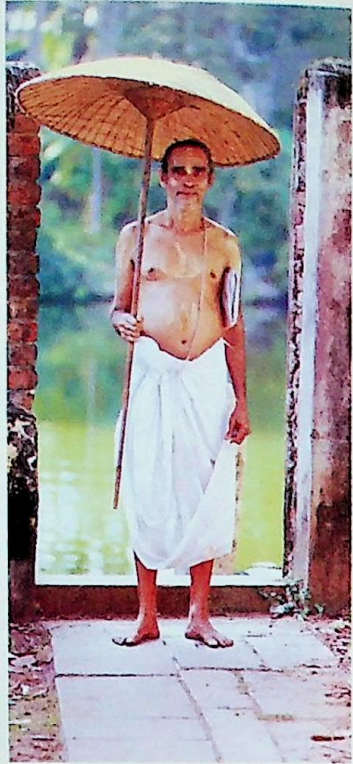


Anantasayee Idol, Brahmaswam Madham, Thrissur

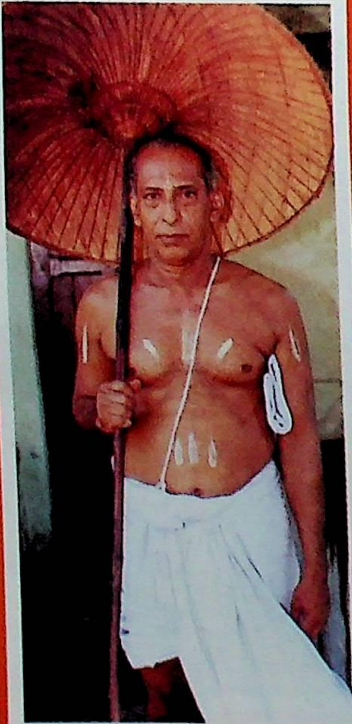




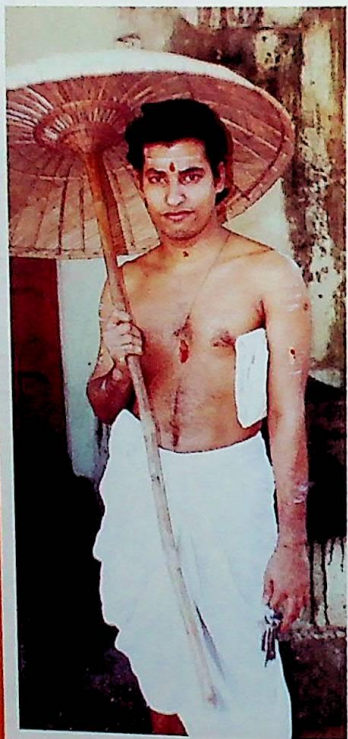
Periya nambi



Panchagavyathu Nambi



Thekaidathu Nambi



Thiru Adamban Nambi



conclude that no rituals could be done for the King alone without performing extra worship to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

In the present day, *Bhadradeepam* in its grand form retreats into the pages of the past. With the abolition of monarchy Sree Chithira Thirunal himself had this ritual discontinued. Only the daily *Bhadradeepa Puja* continues to be done. At the same time the *Kalabham* intended for the Deities progresses as before without any break.

*Bhadradeepam* has been dealt with this much because of the great significance that was attached to it in the general scheme of affairs. Today the *Murajapam* and *Lakshadeepam* are calculated based on the number of *Kalabhams* which have to total twelve in the same manner as the erstwhile *Bhadradeepam*.

### **Kalabham (കളഭം)**

This is a highly specialised ritual the Tantries perform on the Idols in connection with the *Bhadradeepam* and also proceeds for seven days in *Dhanu* concluding on the 1st of *Makaram* (mid January) which marks the change of the solstice from *Dakshinayanam* to *Utharayanam*. While *Kalabham* is performed on the *Abhishekam* and *Siveli Bimbam* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and on the two Devies brought to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* for this purpose, the same is carried out on the *Moola Vighras* of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy inside their respective sanctums. The one prominent variation is that for Sree Krishna Swamy alone *Kalabham* is done only on one day. Like *Kalasam*, *Kalabham* too is conducted after the *Ethirtu Siveli* and in the middle of the *Ucha Puja*.

Only the Namboodiripads can conduct this ceremony. In case of their unavoidable absence (mainly due to pollution) the *Kalabham* will have to be postponed to a date when they can be present.

*Chandanam* (sandal) is ground to a loose paste adding to it many perfumed ingredients of a specified nature. It is impregnated with *Mantras* by the performance of *Pujas* as laid down in the sacred texts. Thereafter *Abhishekam* is done with it on the *Moorthies*. *Kalabham* is deemed to be an oblation with nectar by which both the finite and infinite potency of the Divinity is cooled. It contains within it much spiritual value.

*Kalabham* is conducted twice a year and the second one takes place in *Mithunam* and will be taken up in the events of that month.

### **Malayalam Month Makaram – Mid January to Mid February Makara Siveli (മകരശിവേലി)**

With the change in the solstice, *Utharayanam* commences on the 1st of the Malayalam month of *Makaram*. That night a *Siveli* takes place in which the



Maharaja also participates. Temple records dating to the years 634 ME/1459 AD and 807 ME/1632 AD are available which register the conduct of this *Siveli* even during those times. This is underlined to do away with any misinformation that it started with the *Bhadradeepam* to mark the concluding seventh day of this ritual. Originally this *Siveli* went by the picturesque name *Ayana Sankranti Azhakiya Manikkasiveli* (അയന സംക്രാന്തി അഴകിയ മാണിക്ക ശീവേലി). With the introduction of *Bhadradeepam* it came to be connected in the minds of the people with it and from thence forth, has been known simply as the *Makara Siveli*.

All the ceremonies take place as in the case of the special *Sivelies* and the *Vahanam* used is the Garuda. Apart from the Maharaja, the Swamiyar and the Yogakkar are also present for the *Deeparadhana* at the Eastern *Nata*. *Kanikka* is first offered by the Swamiyar followed by the Valia Thampuram and others. The Swamiyar leaves the procession at a point convenient to him to reach his *Madhom* once the *Deeparadhana* at the Western *Nata* gives over. The prescribed three rounds over, the *Vahanas* are returned to their appointed places and on the completion of the normal rituals the Temple closes for the night.

### Perumthiru Amrithu Puja (പെരുന്തിരു അമൃത പുജ)

This function is conducted twice a year after the two solstice *Sivelies*. In the month of *Makaram*, after the *Makara Siveli* it takes place. Despite the fact that it followed the *Bhadradeepam* it is not possible to link it with that festival as the scrolls of the *Mathilakam* disclose the fact that it existed much before the time the *Bhadradeepam* was started. Records of the Malayalam years 762 and 802 corresponding to the English years 1587 and 1627 detail about this function. The record of 802 ME/1627 AD establishes its inception and subsequent conduct twice a year under the commands of the ruler of that time King Veera Iravi Varma (Refer chapter *Autograph of Ages*) The main aspect of the same is that a grand feast in true Malayalee style is prepared and offered to Sree Padmanabha Perumal. Tantries conduct certain *Pujas* and rites associated with it.

The evening prior to this grand feast, vegetables and other commodities required for it are brought and entrusted to the store-keeper of the Temple. By two in the morning the priests have to bathe and enter the Temple to start cooking for the Perumal's repast. It offers all the traditional items of a Kerala feast including five types of jaggery and coconut milk sweet *Payasam* known as *Prathamam* (പ്രഥമം). Among these, the *Prathamam* termed *Retnappayasam* is the most famous and significant and is offered to Swamy in a grand gold gem-studded vessel.

On the morning of this *Puja* the Tantries reach the Temple by 8.00 a.m. and *Kalasam* is carried out on the two *Bimbis* of Sree Padmanabha Perumal and



also on the *Bimbas* of Sree Lakshmi Devi and Sree Bhoomi Devi on the *Abhisravana Mandapam* with eighty one gold pots. At the same time, *Navakam* is done on the *Moola Bimbas* of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy. This *Kalasam* is intended for prosperity-it is *Samrudhyardham*. After this *Kalasam* and *Kalasa Puja* the Idols are taken back to the sanctum. Along with the *Ucha Puja* the various items of the feast are placed on this *Mandapam* and the Namboodiripad offers *Nivedyam*, *Puja* and *Deeparadhana* to them. Once the Namboodiripad retires to his quarters, inside the *Nalambalam* itself plantain leaves are put and feast served to the priests of the Temple. These items are sent to the Palace as well. The balance is distributed among the work force of the Temple. That evening before the Temple opens at 5.00 p.m. the *Ottakkal Mandapam*, the *Cheruchuttu* and *Nalambalam* are washed and cleaned well.

This *Puja* is a traditional ritual having many moons behind it. From the date available in a *Mathilakam* Record carrying the name of Marthanda Varma it is seen to have been performed in the Malayalam month *Kanni* which is a variation of what is being followed for long now.

### Malayalam Month Kumbhom – Mid February to Mid March Sivaratri (ശിവരാത്രി)

This is a day celebrated all over India as an important day for Sree Parameswara. In the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple special *Abhishekam* is done to the Siva residing in the *Sreekovil* and *Nivedyam* offered.

### Malayalam Month Meenam – Mid March to Mid April

This is another important month for the Temple as the *Painkuni Utsavam* takes the stage during this month. This is the second *Utsavam* of this Temple.

### Painkuni Utsavam (പൈങ്കുനി ഉത്സവം)

All the rites and rituals and functions which take place for the *Alpashi Utsavam* are repeated for this *Utsavam* as well, the difference being in the asterism. While prominence is given to the star *Thiru Onam* under which alone the *Arat* takes place for *Alpashi*, the rest of the nine days being calculated backwards, for this festival the emphasis is on the day of the *Kotiettu* on which the asterism has to be *Rohini* with the rest of the days succeeding it. As such, the *Arat* normally falls when the asterism is *Athom*.

A common misconception circulates that this festival was started by Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma. This is incorrect as there are records of much earlier times in which the *Painkuni* festival finds mention. It is possible that it got discontinued at some point of time due to the traumatic course of events. Marthanda Varma re-started it as another of his lavish offerings to the Perumal.



Another characteristic of this festival is that greater stress was laid on the *Arangams* of the Temple during these days. Ninety nine *Arangams* found a platform to display their talents, many of them coming from outside the city and at times from the neighboring states too. The cosmopolitan and liberal attitude reflected in them has already appeared in the chapter, *Abode of the Divine* and repetition is avoided here. Erection of the massive figures of the five Pandavas facing the Eastern *Gopuram* and the *Vela Kali* performed there were great attractions to the masses.

The Pandava brothers, with special reference to Arjuna, son of Indra the chief celestial of the rains, were put up to ward off the wandering rains which had become a frequent threat during this festival. This too was in the time of Marthanda Varma. As such this festival also got the label *Pancha Pandava Utsavam* or festival of the five Pandavas.

In this *Arat* procession three more other Temples join, which are different from the participating temples of the *Alpashi Arat*. They are Sree Varahamoorthy, Eruveli Sree Krishna Temple and Sree Thrivikramangalam.

### Sree Rama Navami (ശ്രീരാമ നവമി)

During that half of the month when the moon is on the ascent from the first *Thidhi* for ten days up to *Desami*, *Abhishekam* with lime juice is done on the idol of Sree Rama along with special *Pujas* and *Nivedyas*. (This festival too is kept up on an all-India basis).

### Uthrom (ഉത്രം)

On this star, special to Sree Sashta, *Abhishekam* is carried out with gingelly oil on Sree Sashta in this Temple and extra *Nivedyas* offered. Moreover, after the evening *Deeparadhana* concludes, musical recital by the Palace vocalists and rendering of instrumental music also take place.

### Malayalam Month Medom-Mid April to Mid May

#### Vishu (വിഷു)

*Vishu* is an extremely auspicious day in the lives of the Malayalee people. In every home, irrespective of position, auspicious items indicating prosperity known as *Kani* are got ready the previous night so that the first thing people would see on opening their eyes would be the *Kani*, which would usher in good fortune for them.

In the same fashion *Vishukani* is got ready the previous night and placed inside each sanctum before the doors are closed in the shrines of the various Deities in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, for the Divinity in *Saguna* form to view. This consists of rice, cucumber, coconut, betel leaf and arecanut, *Thetti* flowers (*Ixora*) etc. placed in a shallow circular vessel termed *Uruli*. The



*Udavaal* is brought from the Palace and entrusted to the Periya Nambi, who places it along side the *Kani* got ready inside the *Sreekovil* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. On the morning of *Vishu*, the Temple opens an hour earlier, by 3.00 a.m. Valia Thampuram reaches for *Darsanam* and for viewing the *Kani* at 5.00 a.m. The Nambi gives him the *Udavaal* together with the daily *Prasadam*. He also presents the Valia Thampuram with one silver coin on behalf of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. After that the *Nirmalyam* or the previous day's decorations are removed and the Idols are brought to the *Ottakkal Mandapam* for regular rituals. The *Kani* is also taken away.

### Chithra Pournami (ചിത്ര പൗർണ്ണമി)

Along with *Athazha Puja* a *Nivedyam* of gingelly (എള്ള്) is offered.

### Malayalam Month Idavom – Mid May to Mid June

On the day when the asterism is *Visakhom* along with the *Athazha Puja* a *Nivedyam* termed *Pal Manga* is offered. It is a combination of many ingredients with emphasis on milk and mango and is in semi-liquid form.

### Malayalam Month Mithunam – Mid June to Mid July Kalabham (കളഭം)

This month too is important due to the spiritually charged ritual of *Kalabham* conducted for seven days. It runs on lines similar to the *Kalabham* of six months back in the month of *Dhanu*. This *Kalabham* comes to a conclusion on the 1st of the next month *Karkkatakam*. It marks the change of the solstice from *Utharayanam* to *Dakshinayanam*.

### Malayalam Month Karkkatakam-Mid July to Mid August Karkkataka Siveli (കർക്കടക ശിവേലി)

On the first of *Karkkatakam* the *Karkkataka Siveli* takes place. Its procedure is the same as the *Makara Siveli*, which has already been described earlier.

On this day itself along with the *Ucha Puja*, *Plakka Nivedyam* too offered. *Plakka* is jack fruit (ചക്ക).

### Sree Veda Vyasa Jayanthi (ശ്രീ വേദ വ്യാസ ജയന്തി)

In honour of the great Sage Vyasa the *Jayanthi* is celebrated with special *Pujas* and chanting of *Vedas* on the full moon day in *Karkkatakam*.

### Perumthiru Amrithu Puja and Kalasa - As in Makaram Nira and Puthari (നിറയും പുത്തരിയും)

On a date decided by the Palace from among the alternatives reached there from the Temple, the *Nira* and *Puthari* takes place. That morning, the sheaves of grain are ceremoniously brought to the Temple. The Thiru Ampati Kurup



bears on his head a bundle of grain placed in the south-eastern *Mandapam* of the *Padma Teertham* and takes it into the Temple through the main Eastern *Nata* under the supervision of the Executive Officer. He is accompanied by Temple music and many of the staff of the Temple. The sheaf is lowered on the *Peetham* readied for it in the middle of the *Natakashala Mukhappu*. The *Aazhati* performs *Punyaham* on this sheaf, carries it and goes one round of the *Sivelippura* with it. The music continues throughout. One of the Brahmin *Dasas* employed to carry out religious duties collects, from the front of the Temple store, woven grass containers filled with *Avil* and new dried rice and follows the *Aazhati*. He enters the *Nalambalam* through the Eastern entrance and, after going round the sanctums once, places the bundle or sheaves on the lamp-lit *Abhisravana Mandapam* on a *Peetham* kept for this purpose. The *Dasas* in the meanwhile hand over their containers with rice and *Avil* to the *Keezhsanthies* (subordinate priests) at the door of the sacred kitchen. The *Periya Nambi* or *Panchagavyathu Nambi*, as the case may be, removes some sheaves of grain from the bundle after performing *Puja* to the same and takes them inside the *Sreekovil* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and submits them there. Some sheaves are spread out on the *Ottakkal Mandapam*. The *Nambies* of Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy take the sheaves to those sanctums in like manner. The procedure is repeated in all the other shrines inside the Temple complex. Then along with the *Palppayasam* offering, *Avil* made of this *Puthari* (new rice) is submitted. A part of the grain and *Puthari* is reached to the Palace and the remaining bulk made available to the employees of the Temple and others. Recently it has been made possible for the public also to obtain it. The sheaf is attributed with powers of prosperity and enhancing plenty and is tied at strategic places in the homes and preserved the year through till the next sheaf arrives.

The curtain falls on the events that take place in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple during the span of each year. Attention is now invited to the unique *Lakshadeepam* and the *Murajapam* which heralds its arrival.

### Murajapam (മുറജപം)

This greatly sanctified period of concentrated prayer is sexennial in periodicity. The very term reveals its meaning - *Mura* meaning 'turn' and *Japam* 'prayer'. This prayer laid tremendous stress on the chanting of *Vedas* and the *Sahasranamam* (thousand names of Maha Vishnu) by a large number of Namboodiri Brahmins. According to the scriptures, for the enhancement of spiritual effulgence, *Veda Mantra Japam* is absolutely inevitable. It is essentially this prayer concentration that is achieved by the *Murajapam*. In Kerala, *Rig Vedam*, which lays emphasis on *Mantram*, *Yajur Vedam* on *Kriya* (rituals) and *Sama Vedam* on *Sruties* (hymns of praise of the Divine) are in vogue. All these three *Vedas* are daily recited during the span of the *Murajapam* adhering to the



dictate that every rite connected with the Divine attains fulfilment only with the inclusion of *Mantra-Kriya-Sruties*. It is the worship of the *Nada Brahman* in great concentration.

The first *Bhadradeepam* in later times was instituted in 919 ME/1744 AD. A few years hence, in 922 ME/1747 AD a *Murajapam* was conducted. Namboodiries were got down from North Kerala and the prayers were chanted on the *Abhisravana Mandapam*. These were carried out for the sake of prayers and also as a general thanksgiving to Sree Padmanabha Swamy for His unbounded grace. There seems to be no other Hindu King on record to have conducted the same on such a large-scale though<sup>36</sup> on a minor-scale it had been performed in the Temples of Thiruvattar, Valvachagoshtam (near Padmanabhapuram), Suchindrom, Kalkulam and Attingal from time immemorial by Maharaja Marthanda Varma's ancestors. For this *Murajapam*, records show that gold plates and gold pots were submitted to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by the *Yogams* (assemblies) of Thrissur and Tirunava Namboodiries.<sup>37</sup> These two *Yogams* had great standing among the Namboodiries and wielded much influence on the land and society. The *Vadhyans* (chiefs) of both these *Yogams* are seen to have held key positions in the *Murajapam* festival of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The head of the Namboodiries, the *Azhuvancheri Thamprakkal*, held a prominent position in the proceedings.

One *Murajapam* would take place after the performance of twelve *Bhadradeepams* which would repeat at an interval of six months totalling six years to complete the cycle. With the abolition of the *Bhadradeepam* the *Murajapam* is calculated once in six years connecting the *Kalabham* which used to be done along with *Bhadradeepam*. *Murajapam* goes on for 56 days of rituals and prayers with the recital of four types of prayers done daily by a large assembly of Namboodiri Brahmins. In cyclic rotation *Vedajapam* and *Mantrajapam* would be conducted in the morning inside the *Nalambalam*, the *Sahasranama Japam* in the *Sivelippura* at noon<sup>38</sup> and the *Jalajapam* with the Namboodiries standing knee-deep in water in the *Padma Teertham* in the evening. On the night of the first day of the *Murajapam* there is a *Siveli* on the lines of the *Ponnum Siveli* (three rounds) which is known as *Vazhipadu Siveli* (വഴിപ്പാട് ശീവേലി) or *Siveli* as offering. The *Simhasana Vahanam* is used for this procession. There are seven *Muras* (turns) for the *Murajapam* each having eight days duration with a special *Siveli* on the night the *Mura* concludes, bringing the total number of days to fifty six. On the fifty sixth day coinciding

36. P. Shangoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

37. Mathilakam Records – Churuna 78, Ola 112.

38. The author herself remembers the two rows of Brahmins (all Brahmins could participate in this chanting alone) seated the entire length of the *Sivelippura* reciting *Sahasranamam* in the noon. The other *Japas* were exclusively reserved for the Namboodiries.



with the solstice of the first of *Makaram* of the Malayalam month, along with the *Makara Siveli* which is the eighth *Mura*, the fabulous and fabled *Lakshadeepam* festival takes the stage.

Though the first *Murajapam* was recorded in 922 ME/1747 AD it did not culminate in the *Lakshadeepam*, the initial one being three years after it. Today too the *Murajapam* continues but with changes. The most significant is that the *Jalajapam* aimed at removing enemies has been discontinued for certain reasons. Sree Chithira Thirunal himself adopted this step. Another difference is that due to the lessening in the number of participants for the *Sahasranamam* chanting, the venue has been shifted to the *Kulasekhara Mandapam* and the number of participants fixed at seventy five out of which forty five are Namboodiries and the balance thirty other Brahmins.

### Lakshadeepam (ലക്ഷദ്ദീപം)

The maiden *Lakshadeepam* to be celebrated was on the 1st of *Makaram* 925 ME/14th or 15th of January 1750 AD. This year was a landmark in the annals of history of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The festival was conducted with much pomp and fanfare, in the grandest manner possible by King Marthanda Varma whose yearning heart was never satisfied with the endless offerings he poured at the feet of his Swamy. Records state that the financial outlay was to the tune of Rs. Two lakhs.<sup>39</sup>

*Lakshadeepam* literally translates as one lakh lamps. With one lakh of lamps fuelled with the devotion of his entire being, Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal adored Sree Padmanabha Swamy in a spiritual and visual extravaganza. By the grace of God this festival has continued unbroken from then to now. The last one in the time of Sree Chithira Thirunal was in 1165 ME/1990 AD and the latest in 1996 under Sree Uthradom Thirunal. In the year 1146 ME/1971 AD he had with deep regret to agree to the substitution of the outer areas with electric lights instead of the traditional lamps due to the spiralling cost of oil and its scarcity and ban on the large-scale use of edible oil for burning lamps. The change was effected after a *Deva Prasnam* was performed and sanction obtained. The *Lakshadeepam* of 1147 ME/1972 AD was thus the first to be conducted with electrical light support. The latest *Lakshadeepam* was on 14th January 1996 with the next *Lakshadeepam* slated for mid January 1176 ME/2002 AD.

It attracts such large crowds that the lights are put on for three consecutive days – in connection with the *Lakshadeepam*. Traffic becomes very difficult to negotiate and the roads leading to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple are packed with humanity. It would not be an exaggeration to say that on those days all roads lead to this Temple.

39. *Nagam Aiya – The State Manual of Travancore. It says that twenty paras of oil was required to light up one lakh lamps.*



## Ritualistic aspects of Murajapam and Lakshadeepam

### The Murajapam Rituals

This elaborate festival of acknowledged spiritual potency used to be conducted under the supervision of the *Azhuvancheri Thamprakkal*, the *Thirunavaya Vadhyans* and the *Tarananalloor Tantries*. For some time now this responsibility rests solely with the Tantries, with the *Vadhyans* associating themselves during the final stages of the festival.

On the starting day of the *Murajapam* the *Namboodiripad* conducts the *Ganapathy Homam*. Offerings of *Muzhukkappu* and *Otta Thulappayasam* are made to all the three main Deities. For the special night *Siveli*, the *Ananta Vahanas* are taken out and *Siveli* conducted as usual. The *Valia Thampuram* and male members of the family participate in the procession as well as in the subsequent *Mura Sivelies*.

For all the fifty six days of the *Murajapam* special decorations are done and offerings made to Sree Padmanabha Swamy, Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy along with an extra *Nivedyam* of *Avil* to the Sree Hanuman inside. The first of the two *Kalabham* ceremonies conducted each year by the Tantries in the Temple which commences towards the end of the Malayalam month *Dhanu* is for a length of seven days. During the *Murajapam* period apart from these seven days, in continuation for twelve days more, *Kalabham* is carried out, bringing the total to nineteen days of uninterrupted *Kalabhabhishekam* for the *Moorthies*, which is of tremendous spiritual impact. In the Thiru Ampati, *Kalabham* is performed only on one day.

Daily the *Valia Thampuram* and members of his family (ladies included) proceed to the Temple for worship and to listen to the morning prayers and the chanting of *Sahasranamam*.

After seven days when one *Mura* (turn) comes to an end, in the afternoon an additional *Otta Thulappayasam* offering is done and *Siveli* in the *Vahanas* at night takes place. The eighth *Mura Siveli* is the *Lakshadeepam* itself when Sree Padmanabha Perumal is adored in worship with a lakh of lamps. While the other seven take place like the *Utsava Sivelies* this one has certain special features which will be dealt with at a later stage.

The *Vahanas* utilised on the different *Muras* are as follows. On the first *Mura*, *Ananta*, on the second *Kamala*, third and fifth *Indra*, fourth and sixth *Pallakku* and on the seventh *Garuda Vahanas* are taken out in procession. Some of the *Vahanas* were introduced in post-Marthanda Varma period and it is said that earlier it was the *Pallakku Vahanam* which was in maximum use.

When the State of Travancore was in existence, the expenses for this great festival were met by the State itself. With a change in the political structure the

so is made to Thiru Ampati Sree Krishna Swamy



finances were made available for this costly festival from Sree Chithira Thirunal's own resources. He created a separate fund for its continued unhindered conduct, which is currently operational.

## The Lakshadeepam Rituals

The *Siveli* conducted on the concluding day of the *Murajapam* is known as *Lakshadeepam*. It doubles as the annual *Makara Siveli* as well.

On the morning of the *Lakshadeepam* when the Valia Thampuran went for his usual morning worship, he used to submit one gold necklace known as *Vilva Sarappoli Mala* and money to the Perumal. Now additional money is substituted for the necklace. That evening he goes to the Temple at 6.00 p.m., offers a length of silk and money to the Swamy, worships at the other shrines as usual and returns to the Palace.

Well before the night *Siveli* all the permanent lights (oil and electric) inside and outside the Temple as well as the temporary light structures, fancy and conservative placed at every available place which includes even the outer reaches of the *Sivelippura*, are lit. Garlands of scintillating lights cascade down the majestic eastern *Gopuram* in brilliant display. The total effect of this galaxy of lamps in dazzling illumination serves well to act as a fit setting to receive and rejoice in the radiance of the Lord of Light.

To witness the *Lakshadeepam*, which in the literal sense of the term lives up to it, before 7.30 p.m. itself, the Temple grounds and other available spaces get crowded to maximum capacity by devotees. In order to ensure that no untoward incidents occur, restrictions and elaborate safeguards are imposed.

At exactly 8.30 p.m. the *Siveli* commences. As mentioned earlier, this procession moves on the lines of the *Makara Siveli*, the one variation being the participation of the Valia Thampuran during all the three circumambulations. After the third round he prostrates himself at the *Dhwaja Sthambham*, receives *Prasadam* as usual and returns. (On all other occasions he accompanies the Deities only on one round).

The morning after the *Lakshadeepam* during his routine worship, Valia Thampuran used to submit a gold *Sarappoli Mala*, a gold coin, pure silk etc. at each of the three main shrines which included the two Deities as well as Sree Raghava Perumal. With changing circumstances and escalation in gold price, the gold necklaces are no longer offered. Money is submitted instead. This has been the practice from 1153 ME/1978 AD. As he returns after worship he offers a young tusker to Sree Padmanabha Perumal, at the gold flag mast. This is known as *Ana Uruviruttal* (ആന ഉരുവിരുത്തൽ) which is described as follows.

This elephant is decorated with the burnished gold-plated front-piece (തെളിപ്പട്ടം) and made to stand near the flag-mast facing the west before the



Valia Thampuran reaches the spot after worship. Close by stand the mahout and a little further away the designated Dasas and one Desi (priest). When the Valia Thampuran arrives he receives the *Ankusham* (hooked rod) and stick from the Dasa who is given the same by the mahout. Valia Thampuran prays to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and returns the same to the Dasa and goes back.

Thereafter the Desi mounts the elephant and proceeds through the *Sivelippura* in a clockwise direction till he reaches the shrine of the Kshetrapalan on the northern side. The elephant crosses this shrine, enters the *Nalambalam* via the northern entrance and makes one circumambulation and enters the *Cheruchuttu* through the northern *Nata*. It is brought to a halt near the *Ottakkal Mandapam*. The Periya Nambi sprinkles *Teertham* on the elephant and gives it *Prasadam* through the Desi and then he bestows a name on it. The mahout subsequently takes the elephant out by the same route.

On the succeeding day a lavish feast is given to the participants in the prayers for the *Murajapam*. With this, the unique and sublime festival draws to a conclusion.

## Royal Festivals

At the outset itself it has been mentioned that the festivals and events of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple were two-fold in nature, purely religious and positively royal. The overwhelming majority falls within the former category and they continue to exist with inevitable alterations in quantity while quality remains unaffected. The latter rituals, which are mainly four-fold in number, have all become non-functional, barring one, but cannot be excluded due to the position of importance held by them till the fairly recent past.

### Thirumudi Kalasam (തിരുമുടി കലശം)

Once a Thampuran assumes the position of the Valia Thampuran or ruler, this rite is done to him by the Tantri. It involves a certain procedure through the execution of which the *Vishnu Amsham* (വിഷ്ണു അംശം) in the ruler is acknowledged and venerated ritualistically. It continues to be conducted and was last performed in the case of Sree Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma – the present Valia Thampuran, in 1166 ME/1991 AD before the first *Utsavam* of the Temple in which he was to participate as Valia Thampuran. This ritual is a prerequisite to assuming that position during the festival.

### Bhadradeepam (ഭദ്രദീപം)

A repetition of the above mentioned event appears superfluous as it has been gone into in great detail earlier in this chapter. Though basically royal in nature, there was enough infusion of spirituality to counter-balance it. The



*Jaimineeya Samhita* of the *Brahmanda Puranam* was utilised for *Parayanam* (reading as prayer) during this festival.<sup>40</sup>

### Thulapurusha Danam (തൂലാപുരുഷ ദാനം)

The scriptures extol the spiritual worth and sanctity of sixteen *Maha Danas* or predominantly great gifts or offerings. Of them, one of the most expensive is the *Thulapurusha Danam*.

*Thulapurusha Danam* is a ceremony performed by weighing the person of the king against an equal quantity of gold and distributing the same among Brahmins. For this purpose the rulers of Travancore used to procure the said quantity of gold which would be coined in different sizes and weights after purification. These coins would carry on one side the sacred inscription '*Sree Padmanabha*' which was the appellation of the family Deity of the House of Travancore.

A pair of ornamental scales, specifically constructed with this end in view was used for this *Danam*. They were fixed by a beam to two engraved granite pillars which stand next to the *Bhadradeepappura*. As silent sentinels of past historic grandeur, they can be seen there to this day.

On the appointed day decided after careful astrological consultations, the king would worship at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and arrive at the place where the function was to take place. Brahmin scholars of the locality and those from Malabar, Thirunelveli, Madurai and other areas with which Travancore had much contact and influence, as well as special invitees would stand by in attendance. The designated Namboodiries would perform ceremonies as laid down by the *Vedas*. The Sovereign was then seated on a scale, his symbol of authority, the sword laid across his lap and the coined gold heaped on the other scale till it came to rest on the ground and the other one rose up in the air with the king seated on it. (Normally this *Danam* is accomplished when the two scales come on par, here it is magnified). The ceremony having come to a conclusion, the gold coins were distributed among Brahmins. Being coins of varying weights, Brahmins of learning would get the most valuable ones and the ordinary Brahmins and Brahmin ladies and children would receive those of still lesser value. The erudition of the Brahmins who were qualified to receive the most valuable ones was determined by a strict examination of the knowledge of the *Vedas*. The whole ceremony spread out over a week with the actual weighing done on the last day. During the entire period, sumptuous feasts were laid before the Brahmins. *Vedam* recitals and chanting of scriptures

40. K. Sambasiva Sastri – *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts (Maharaja's Palace Library)*



formed part of this complex ceremony. (Religion itself prescribes gold as the substance having the highest order of merit among all commodities with which *Thulabharam* may be performed. It is logical that only Sovereigns would be in a position to utilise it due to the cost involved).

### Hiranyagarbha Danam (ഹിരണ്യഗർഭ ദാനം)

A great deal of misinformation exists with regard to this lavish *Danam*, the second most costly among the sixteen rituals performed by an individual. The notion that this ritual was necessary for obtaining an elevation in rank is absurd. Moreover the Kings of Travancore did not stand in any need of performing ceremonies to gain a rise in dignity, caste or rank which were all theirs traditionally. A dissertation on the established purity of Kshatriya blue blood of this dynasty or its superiority of standing is a digression as far as this work goes and this aspect is being terminated with one observation that *Hiranyagarbham* was not performed by them for treading up the ladder of supremacy but as a mandatory ceremony before assumption of the title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'.

*Hiranyagarbham* was performed by emperors and rulers after their coronation. It is said that they should have ruled a minimum number of years before they qualified for it. A vessel, shaped like a lotus flower, ten feet high and eight feet in circumference with a lid in the shape of a crown was fashioned of pure gold. This was half-filled with *Panchagavyam* and prayers performed over it by the Namboodiri priests as per the canons of the *Vedas*. After worship inside the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple the king would proceed to where this vessel was kept accompanied by the Tantries and Brahmin scholars from Kerala and neighboring States. The king then entered this vessel with the aid of a beautifully constructed ladder and the lid would be placed on it. As he dipped himself fully inside the liquid component five times, the assembled priests would continue praying and chanting hymns. The whole ceremony lasted about ten minutes. Then he would emerge from the vessel and descend the ladder. After further ceremonies were completed, returning to the inner reaches of the Temple he would prostrate himself before the *Moorthy* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The Tarananalloor Tantri would then take the fabled crown of the 'Kulasekharas' and as the atmosphere resounded with prayers, would place it on the King's head bestowing on him the ancient title of 'Kulasekhara Perumal'.

From the time Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma dedicated his State, his family and himself to Sree Padmanabha Perumal with the historic *Thrippati Danam*, this crown would be used only once after the conduct of *Thulapurusha Danam* and *Hiranyagarbha Danam*. The ruler would then gain the title 'Kulasekhara Perumal' and the crown would be placed on his head by the



Tarananalloor Tantri only on this occasion. Since the rulership now vested with the God, the Kings of Travancore no longer performed a ceremony which involved crowning them when they assumed office of the Valia Thampuran or Thrippappoor Mooppan. On top of this crown are seen two feet in gold representing the sacred feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. To symbolically carry them on the head with all devotion and reverence was deemed the greatest mark of honour by the Travancore rulers.

It is believed that Cheraman Perumal when he divided his Kerala Empire into four, gave his crown<sup>41</sup> to the Travancore King and enjoined on him and his successors the performance of *Thulapurusha Danam* and *Hiranyagarbha Danam* as preliminary to wearing this fabled crown. While no authentic written record is available with the actual dates of the initial ceremonies, there is no question mark on its ancient vintage and continued conduct till the time of Sree Chithira Thirunal of the modern age.<sup>42</sup> A later record available is included for general interest.

On the 12th of *Makaram* 3412 of the Kali year corresponding to 24th January 311 AD King Veera Kerala Varma in keeping with tradition and adhering to the codes of conduct prescribed by Sree Parasurama, conducted these mighty ceremonies of *Thulapurusha Danam* and *Hiranyagarbham*. He had assembled Brahmins from many villages to participate in the same. The Namboodiripad<sup>43</sup> of Tarananalloor who was the 'family priest' performed the rituals. (The usage family priest is significant as it provides a vital link between Travancore and these Namboodiripads who at a later stage came to occupy the position of great religious power in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as Tantries). Veera Kerala Varma thus assumed the family titles of *Kiritapati* and *Kulasekhara Perumal*.

The rites, rituals, festivals, *Pujas*, and events have been thus covered including a few which due to their importance have featured here despite the fact that they are now obsolete. The one remaining aspect is with regard to the offerings available for the devotees to perform at the Temple. They present a whole graph in terms of expenditure from Rs. 10/- for an *Abhishekam* with *Vibhooti* (holy ash) for Sree Sastha to the *Oru Divasathe Puja* (ഒരു ദിവസത്തെ പൂജ) an entire day's *Puja* costing Rs. 5000/-. All rates are liable to change.

Before proceeding to that aspect certain general guidelines to devotees are offered.

41. P. Shungoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.

42. Due to the huge expenditure involved, Sree Chithira Thirunal did not perform these ceremonies as he was not in favour of taxing his State for it.

43. P. Shungoonny Menon – 'A History of Travancore'.



## GUIDE TO WORSHIP

ADMISSION IS RESTRICTED TO PERSONS WHO PROFESS THE HINDU RELIGION

### Permitted Dress:

1. **For Males** : *Dhoties* with or without *Angavastram*. (This will apply to male children of all ages). Upper clothing is not allowed.
2. **For Females** : *Sarees*, *Dhoties* or *Pavadas* with blouse or other covering as is appropriate to the age. Young girls below 12 years may wear gowns/frocks.

No other type of dress is allowed to be worn or taken inside. It is the custom for worshippers going near the Sanctum Sanctorum to tie the *Angavastram*, if any, round their waist.

### TIMINGS FOR DARSANAM

Morning	1.	04.15 a.m.	to	05.15 a.m.
	2.	06.45 a.m.	to	07.15 a.m.
	3.	08.30 a.m.	to	10.00 a.m.
	4.	10.30 a.m.	to	11.15 a.m.
	5.	11.45 a.m.	to	12.00 noon
Evening	6.	05.00 p.m.	to	06.15 p.m.
	7.	06.45 p.m.	to	07.30 p.m.

N.B. : The above timings are subject to change during *Utsavam* and *Kalabham* ceremonies.

For all *Vazhipadus*, *Archanas* etc. get information only from the Sreekariakkar inside the Temple or from the Temple office at the Western Entrance.

### What you should not do while inside the Temple

1. Do Not take umbrellas, walking sticks, sandals, slippers, photographic equipment and weapons of any type.
2. Do Not sit or lie prostrate or place any article on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* in front of the main Sanctum Sanctorum.
3. Do Not engage unauthorised guides. Authorised guides with identification badges and approved rates are available inside the Temple.
4. Do Not carry much jewellery or unnecessary cash with you.
5. Do Not smoke.
6. Do Not spit or commit nuisance or throw rubbish.

Executive Officer  
Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple  
Fort, Thiruvananthapuram



## VAZHIPADUS IN THE SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE

### SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY

No.	Particulars	Rates
1	Muzhukkappu	125.00
2	Ksheerabhishekam	20.00
3	Nei Vilakku	10.00
4	Valia Alankaram	25.00
5	Sahasranamarchana	15.00
6	Purushasooktham	15.00
7	Sreesooktham	15.00
8	Bhagyasooktharchana	15.00
9	Ashtothararchana	10.00
10	Veda Mantharchana	10.00
11	Santhanagopalarchana	10.00
12	Panchamritham	40.00
13	Thrimadhuram	10.00
14	Nei Payasam	25.00
15	Sarkara Payasam	25.00
16	Aravana Payasam	25.00
17	Idichupizhinja Payasam (1 unit)	25.00
18	Palppayasam (1 litre)	40.00
19	Otta Thulappayasam	275.00
20	Meni Thulappayasam	2400.00
21	Panthrandu Thulappayasam	3100.00
22	Unni Appam (1 unit - 15 nos)	25.00
23	Vatsan	20.00
24	Avil	10.00
25	Cooked rice Nivedyam	1.00
26	Dadyanakam	10.00
27	Pongal	20.00

### SREE NARASIMHA SWAMY

1	Muzhukkappu	150.00
2	Ksheerabhishekam	20.00



**WORSHIP OF THE CELESTIAL**

361

3	Nei Vilakku	10.00
4	Valia Alankaram	25.00
5	Atta Vilakku	125.00
6	Sahasranamarchana	15.00
7	Ashtothararchana	10.00
8	Panakam (1 unit)	20.00
9	Otta Ada (1)	15.00

**VEDA VYASA SHRINE**

1	Unni Appam (1 unit - 15 nos)	25.00
2	Vidyarambham	10.00

**THIRU AMPATI SREE KRISHNA SWAMY**

1	Muzhukkapu	150.00
2	Ksheerabhishekam	20.00
3	Nei Vilakku	10.00
4	Valia Alankaram	25.00
5	Sahasranamarchana	15.00
6	Astothararchana	10.00
7	Panchamritham	40.00
8	Thrimadhuram	10.00
9	Palppayasam (1 unit)	40.00
10	Avil	15.00

**SREE DHARMASASTHA SHRINE**

1	Muzhukkapu	1000.00
2	Nei Abhishekam	5.00
3	Bhasmabhishekam	20.00
4	Nei Vilakku	10.00
5	Neeranjnam	20.00
6	Malachavitheetu Pujichu Kodukkunnathinu	5.00

**SREE AGRASHALA MAHA GANAPATHY**

1	Muzhukkapu	75.00
2	Ganapathy Homam	51.00
3	Nei Vilakku	10.00
4	Modakam (1 unit - 20 nos)	35.00



**SREE HANUMAN SWAMY**

1	Muzhukkappu with Butter (full)	800.00
2	Muzhukkappu with Butter (half)	400.00
3	Mukha Muzhukkappu with Butter (face)	200.00
4	Astothararchana	10.00
5	Vadamala (1 unit)	60.00
6	Vadamala (6 unit)	360.00
7	Betel leaf mala (mala with 151 betel leaves)	60.00
8	Silver Anki Charthal	300.00

**COMMON VAZHIPADUS**

1	Oru Divasathe Puja (one day whole Puja)	5000.00
2	Nirmallyam to Deeparadhana	450.00
3	Nirmallyam to Usha Puja	500.00
4	Nirmallyam to Pantheeradi Puja	800.00
5	Nirmallyam to Ucha Puja	2000.00
6	Ponnum Siveli	1000.00
7	Ponnum Siveli with Illumination	1600.00
8	Niradeepam – Ottakkal Mandapathinu Chuttum	700.00
9	Niradeepam (full)	1750.00
10	Ananthavahanathil Ezhunnallippu	1000.00
11	Malaketti Alankaram	1300.00
12	Nadakkuvaikkunnathinu	20.00
13	Malachartheetu Pujichu kodukkunnathinu (Thali & Mala)	100.00
14	Marriage	150.00
15	Thulabharam	50.00
16	Anna Prasam (Timing between 10 and 10.30 a.m.)	10.00
17	Vidyarambham (In front of the Veda Vyasa shrine)	10.00

**PERMANENT SEVA**

1	Valia Alankaram (1 year)	2000.00
2	Sahasranamarchana	1500.00
3	Astothararchana	1000.00

*Executive Officer*  
*(Col. K. Gopinathan Nayar)*



*Pujas*, rites and rituals are remember to tell the soul of a temple. It is for this reason that the chapter under survey has been detailed at such length. Worship of the Divine is a benediction of supreme magnitude bestowed on the mortals through intellect, intelligence, instinct, intuition and introspection. At times it is the result of direct or indirect revelation through God and His chosen ambassadors who come as sages, saints and realised souls.

The effulgence that is Sree Padmanabha Swamy as worshipped in this ancient Abode of name and fame in Thiruvananthapuram is a complete experience. The heart, mind, body and the soul that resides within are elevated to another plane of exaltation which is difficult to transcribe. As another existence within our mundane existence, the radiant Swamy who is Sree Padmanabha Perumal reigns as the gentle, benign refuge of peace and solace adorned and adored by the love that washes those sacred Feet in eternal homage. The prayers and rituals in this Temple, which become hallowed vibrations, have been nurtured and passed on with care to be cherished and preserved as an ongoing commitment to spirituality.



## 13

## MIRACLES OF THE SREE PADMANABHA SWAMY TEMPLE

The world God created is by itself a miracle of the highest order, what is considered to be His super production – man – is yet another miracle. The daily wonders spread before us by nature are also miraculous but we get so accustomed to all these that they get taken for granted and we bestow no special emotion of wonder on them. Perhaps that may be the reason why God in His paramount wisdom decreed that miracles occur at times to fortify man's faith and also to remind him that he is not the supreme master but that there is one above him for whom the incredible and amazing is the same as the credible and ordinary. Some miracles take place as acts of grace and protection while yet others assume the nature of warnings but whatever they may be, they also form a part of the eternal wonder that is God.

The following are a few of the amazing incidents obtained from the *Mathilakam Records*.

On 10.6.738 ME/1563 AD there was flow of milk from the front platform (*Mandapam*). This was during the reign of King Adithya Varma.<sup>1</sup> This ruler was thrice blessed as the next year also stood witness to a similar incident and the milk was seen flowing from the southern side of the facing platform,<sup>2</sup> to be followed by yet another manifestation of milk two years later, flowing on the ground near the south side of the *Mandapam*.<sup>3</sup> These were all considered as signs of good fortune.

In the fourth month of 779 ME/1603 AD during the reign of King Veera Ravi Varma, one day when the maids went to sweep the premises near the

1. *Mathilakam Records kept in the Central Archives Vol. I.*

2. *Mathilakam Records in the Central Archives. Vol. I, Churuna 25, Ola 75.*

3. *Mathilakam Records in the Central Archives Vol. I, Churuna number not at hand.*  
CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhanta eGangotri Gyaan Kosha



northern entrance, to their wonder, the sound of ringing bells, tinkling of anklets and pattering of feet were heard by them.<sup>4</sup>

After a long lapse, once again milk appeared bubbling like boiling rice on the north side from the floor fairly near the Sree Rama Swamy shrine.<sup>5</sup> King Veera Iravi Varma who ruled the land at that time came to witness this auspicious occurrence and reverentially partook of a small quantity of this milk. These appearances of milk lent great credibility to the belief that since the Lord is visualised as reclining on Ananta who floats on the Ocean of Milk, that Ocean really exists below. This was in the year 803 ME/1628 AD. There is a popular opinion that the lead seen as joints on the granite flooring of the inner areas was poured to stop the seepage of milk.

The evolutionary process of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple had its high and low tides of prosperity and adversity, even as it rested on the conceptual cosmic ocean. The period from 848-852 ME/1673-1677 AD was a dark interregnum for the Temple when it had to remain closed due to an insurmountable deadlock. Before this calamity came to pass too, off and on the routine worship used to get suspended. On one such occasion in 848 ME/1673 AD King Adithya Varma, who was the Chiravayi Mooppan, and the senior Rani of Attingal together had the shrine opened for re-commencement of *Pujas*. The presence of a serpent which had miraculously appeared in this locked-up area, is registered in the Temple records.<sup>6</sup> This was taken as a serious warning or forerunner of events to come.

Even after the official reopening of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the atmosphere of disquiet and upheavals continued. Three or four serpents showed themselves on the *Abhisravana Mandapam*.<sup>7</sup> As a follow up, when the sanctum was opened for offering *Nivedyam* yet another serpent appeared. The senior Rani of Attingal, Umayamma Rani ruling as the Regent, who was directly involved with the Temple administration as Queen, was immediately informed. Required steps were taken by her to propitiate the said Powers.

The year 861 ME/1686 AD witnessed yet another great calamity as a great fire raged through the Temple.<sup>8</sup> It was only the grace of the Lord that saved it from total ruin. The miracle by which the main Idol of wood was saved, with the loss of just three fingers of the left hand and all toes of the left leg, even as the roof of the sanctum crashed down on it in a flaming mass, is on record. It is incredible that only minimal damage was done though even the vessels and

4. *Mathilakam Records in the Central Archives Churuna 2A, Ola 1, 22.4. 778 ME/1603 AD.*

5. *Mathilakam Records.- Churuna 2602, Olas 13 and 14, 29-12. 803 ME/1628 AD.*

6. *Mathilakam Records in Central Archives - Vol. I.*

7. *Mathilakam Records in Central Archives - Vol. I - Churuna 25, Ola 12, year and date 17.10.853 ME/1678 AD.*

8. *Mathilakam Records - Churuna 2 A, Ola 26 (Grantha Pura).*



lamps around were reduced to molten lumps. The ruler at that time was Iravi Varma or Ravi Varma.

In the time of the epoch-making reign of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma the Great, for some reason it became necessary to make a depression in the ground at the feet of the Lord, in the sanctum.<sup>9</sup> Hardly had the work begun when it was found that muddy water was rushing into the shallow hole. The work was suspended at once. This happening too was unexpected and unusual as the base was all solid granite.

The true incident of the eruption of fire during the consecration of the Sree Narasimha Moorthy ignited by the high potency contained within, has already been included elsewhere. Similarly the well of ghee and the *Thiruvolakka Mandapam* have also featured in that self -same chapter under the heading *Legends and Folklore*.

Maharaja Bala Rama Varma had to face a traumatic period during his time as the ruler of the land. As though the stressful events relating to the throne were not sufficient, an incident occurred which was viewed by all in dismay as a bad omen. On the 5th day of the tenth month of *Idavom* (mid June) in the Malayalam year 984 ME/1809 AD at midnight from the interior of the Temple the sound of many bells ringing accompanied by the fearsome roar of a beast (possibly lion) could be heard all around.<sup>10</sup> (This was deemed to be a sign of deep displeasure of Sree Narasimha Swamy).

Another unusual event is recorded in the manuals of the Temple though no satisfactory explanation has been arrived at as its interpretation.<sup>11</sup> This was in 994 ME/1818 AD on 21st *Vrischikom* (November). The routine *Sreebeli* had commenced and the priests had emerged after completing the inner circumambulation and arrived at the appointed spot in the Eastern *Sreebelippura*. The priest carrying the Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy informed the Periya Nambi that he was experiencing something out of the ordinary. Directions were immediately issued to keep a close watch on this priest. Sree Krishna Swamy's Idol joined the procession at a later stage and after the worship at the Western *Sreebelippura*, a sudden change occurred. A superimposition of divinity seems to have penetrated the priests carrying the Idols of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and Sree Narasimha Swamy and they started to race along with great speed. With considerable difficulty a number of priests together were able to partially control them by force and make them complete the prescribed rounds and return the Idols to their respective shrines. The Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy started to vibrate by itself standing on its pedestal in overcharge of

9. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 2A, Ola 1. (Grantha Pura)*

10. *Mathilakam Records – Grantha Pura.*

11. *Mathilakam Records – Churuna 88, Ola 142. (Grantha Pura)*



some divine current. The matter being immediately conveyed to the then ruler of Travancore, Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi, by the *Anavaal* (an official of the Temple with the responsibility of reporting Temple matters to the ruler without restriction on suitability of time) she immediately reached the Temple, personally saw the divine manifestation and paid her homage.

During the time of Maharaja Ayillyom Thirunal on 8.4.1041 ME/1866AD, at one o' clock at night once again a roar shattered the silence. No further details are available. Even today the presence of an invisible lion, believed to be Sree Narasimha Swamy, is felt by those staff who move about there, especially after the *Pujas* are over and the Temple closes its doors.

One miracle which has been tested by time repeatedly is that the butter smeared on the massive figure of Sree Hanuman Swamy near the main *Belikkal* never melts however hot the day may be, never gets rancid and is never eaten by ants or other insects. This is a living truth. Even during the outbreak of fire in 1110 ME/1934 AD, which came so close to Hanuman, its fierce heat did not succeed in melting the butter which remained as fresh and unchanged as ever!

Many are the miracles this Hanuman Swamy has to His credit. People who saw Him appearing near where the fire raged, mace in hand to control its approach, are still alive. He is said to have indicated that the fire would not spread further than that point and so it was.

A disembodied voice was heard by the panic stricken priests who tried to break open the locked door of the Sree Narasimha Swamy shrine in their desperation, to remove the Idol, while the other staff toiled to take out the many beautiful *Vahanas* of the Deities to safety. The voice proclaimed that the fire would not spread to those inner regions. That too proved true.

As soon as the outbreak of fire was reported to the Palace, Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma and his mother Maharani Setu Parvathi Bayi rushed to the Temple. It is a well known fact that even as the Government machinery swung into action and people from all walks of life and religions poured in to fight the flames, the Maharaja stood by himself in deep prayer for a short spell of time. The fire had come under control by the time his prayers of pain had concluded. It is easy for those who had known Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma to accept without hesitation the power contained in him and in his supplication to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

Another miracle vouched for by many who have seen it is that relating to the figure of the Dwarapalakan facing the east right behind the Sree Hanuman Swamy. During Sree Chithira Thirunal's time, this Dwarapalaka's leg started to elongate all of a sudden. The wooden railing had to be chopped off to accommodate the growing foot. Though it has now stopped doing so, the railing with chopped off portion which has been left as it is bears testimony to this fact.



A good many persons have heard the subdued voice of the waves from inside the shrine when they press their ears to the outer wall of the sanctum, especially at the area marking the sacred feet, supporting the belief that the sanctum contains the Ocean of Milk. A more mystic reading is that what is audible is the vibration of the *Pranavam*.

In the same way, charges are experienced by some which seem to spiral up from under the ground near the group of *Belikkals* on the southern side outside the sanctum of Sree Krishna Swamy, which are also attributed to the overflow of concentrated potency.

Two personal experiences have been directly described to the author by the 44th Swamiyar of the *Munchira Madhom*, Sri Krishnadasa Vasudeva Brahmananda Teertha Swamigal who had the fortune of doing *Pushpanjali* at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple for twelve years. While he had certain spiritual experiences which he is unwilling to make public, the following two are being included with his permission.

After the Valia Thampuran (Sree Chithira Thirunal) had left following his routine worship, an uproar ensued outside. The circular gold vessel of small size which was one among a set of vessels used for giving *Prasadam* to the Maharaja, had suddenly vanished. A crow was spotted by some of the staff, flying away with it in its beak. All efforts to make it drop the vessel were in vain. The next day the Swamiyar once more heard a commotion. On top of a pillar of the *Alankara Mandapam* the cup had been found. The miracle was that instead of one cup taken away by the crow, two identical ones had appeared.

The next incident narrated by him runs thus. Even if it were not his turn to conduct the *Pushpanjali* inside the sanctum, if he were in Thiruvananthapuram he was particular that he too would perform the same. During one such time, following indisposition he did not bathe or go to the Temple, for a day. Early the next morning the Swamiyar was awakened by a voice calling out to him, "*Arise, it is time for the Pushpanjali*". Immediately he got up but found not a soul anywhere there. Accepting it is a Divine directive, he at once got ready and went for worship. His ailment also disappeared simultaneously.

An event which continues to evoke joyous wonder in the hearts of the devotees is the unfailing appearance of the auspicious *Krishnapparunthu* (kite) which arrives as though by celestial command, to encircle the two flag masts as the flags are hoisted and fly away to the distant skies thereafter.

Since personal experiences which can be only labelled as miracles do not come within the orbit of this chapter, it comes to a conclusion here. The greatest miracle after all is Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself.



14

## UNDER THE MANTLE OF SREE PADMANABHA

### Socio-Economic and Political Role of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple

**I**n the great subcontinent of India, religion and temple culture were inalienable aspects of social life and that is perhaps stating the obvious. This is not surprising as the temples were the hub of all activity, which in turn found their echoes in the temples themselves. Even in the present scientific age, when rationalism is vaunted, the influence of the temples and their importance cannot be underestimated.

Coming to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in particular, this great devotional centre, famed far and wide, stamped its hallmark on a whole graph of activity enveloping the socio-economic scene with a deep impact. As such, these connotations are too significant to be overlooked. On the social front it used to be the meeting ground of people and a platform for exchange of news. Functions like marriages, *Annaprasam* (giving babies rice for the first time, an important function among the Hindus), naming of babies, feeding of Brahmins and the poor, and giving feasts to mark important events were conducted, serving the social needs of the people, only ceremonies connected with actual death found no place due to certain types of pollution attributed to them. Since the Temple was the venue for many learned discourses of religious and scholastic character and superb cultural performances, people thronged there on such occasions for education and entertainment. During the passage of time, changes came about in some of these activities especially from the reign of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma when outside involvement in many areas became limited due to specific reasons which are dealt with elsewhere. Once again, now the Temple stands open for public participation. Art and education and

*Praised as  
as sides as  
a very important  
or successful.*



contributions of learned men never waned as long as monarchy existed, and the Temple continued to be a centre of art and learning.

The Temple festivals and performances were the times when the people got a chance to dress up at their best and take part in the merry-making and fun. These events were awaited with much anticipation as the major festivities involving the society under the banner of the religious authority, which was the Temple. It was also a sacred place for common worship. In this context one has to add a few lines on distribution of food which was mainly to the Brahmins (including poor Brahmins and students who came to the Temple to study the *Vedas* and scriptures). This was of such unequalled proportions that along with the spiritual fame, the name Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, as provider of food, spread far and wide. Awesome indeed was the magnitude of this sacred *Annadanam*, which covered all the three hundred and sixty five days of the year. As such, the propagation of scriptures and the *Vedas* flourished. Even today, the daily chanting of the three *Vedas* continues in unbroken tradition, down the centuries in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. One very significant fact that gets overlooked is that this Temple used to give food from its resources to certain Christian fisherfolk also. The Temple records state off and on about the facilities extended to Muslim visitors from outside the State and financial aid being provided for their food. Specific mention is made of a group of Muslim pilgrims who were accorded all hospitality when they stopped over in the city, on their way to Mecca. Such instances of acceptance and charity without other motives are rare or unheard of in known religious history.

Apart from the main thrust on Brahmin feeding, the Temple also acquitted itself well as an institution of poor relief with *Nivedyam* being distributed as charity to the poor non-Brahmins too. Even now food is given away free to a limited number of needy people.

In this context there is an oft-repeated criticism that unrestrained Brahmin feeding led to the creation of a class of social parasites. While it might have been true in some cases, that drawback was fully compensated by the spiritual and scholarly excellence produced by the system and the many men of eminence it gifted to the land. Even some of the well known all-India personalities of today recollect with emotion the rice they partook daily from the Temple in their student days. It should be remembered too that it was largely due to the protection of the priestly class by the rulers in particular and the community at large that the religious continuity and unbroken culture of ancient India has survived for eroding centuries and withstood alien influences, to live on as the boon of our ancestors to posterity.

Another significant social aspect requires to be specifically stressed. 'Socialism', as it is termed today, existed in no small measure in the Temple in



the bygone days under the rulers. This fact is rarely remembered now. While it cannot be denied that caste system prevailed here as in other parts of India, despite its constraints and the taboos of different time frames, the Temple extended special rights and privileges to communities falling outside the circle of the higher castes. Many are the available instances of its outlook of acceptance. The extreme importance given to the Pulayas has featured time and again in different areas of the book. Apart from the past events, paddy from the Pulaya field for food offering to the Lord was, till recently, an ongoing tradition. It is recorded that in the past a tribal of the hills was required to light the fire marking the commencement of the Temple festival.<sup>1</sup> Another instance is the large-scale and mandatory participation of the lower castes in the *Arangams* or performing arts presented during the festivals of this Temple. It was the Ezhava community's privilege to reach the stones for the Temple constructions. The examples cited are over and above the liberal attitude to other religions which have been mentioned before. Considering the times, this was socialism at its best and can only be described as progressive and exceptional.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple holds a place all its own in the role it played in promoting scholars and as an institution of excellence in Sanskrit and religious instruction. Many institutions and individuals imparting free education thrived in and around the Temple due to its generosity. The high rate of literacy seen here today could be the legacy of the large-scale free educational policy adopted by the Temple. Thiruvananthapuram with this Temple as the pivotal point became famed all over India as a great educational centre and learned men and scholars who flooded here were all welcomed and honoured with gifts. The role of the Temple as a law-giver and as an asylum against enemies too were in evidence whenever the situations called for it. This was not a special feature but a general rule applicable to all temples.

The cultural and artistic aspects will be discussed in other chapters. As such, suffice it to mention that art and culture bloomed here and that apart from scholars, artisans, craftsmen, artists of various systems, musicians and their dependents, thrived under the patronage of the Temple. Ninety nine different art forms or *Arangams* received full protection and prospered. (Refer chapter *Abode of the Divine*).

The economic role of the Temple was and continues to be greatly significant. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple has all along been a large-scale consumer of a vast range of consumer goods like milk, sugar, rice, sandal wood, firewood, oil, flowers, butter, ghee, jaggery etc. to mention some. This in turn contributes directly to the prosperity of the merchants, the middle men and the producers

1. 'Kerala Charithram' - IInd Volume - Page. 317 by Kerala History Association



at the grass root level. The large number of participating artists of the ninety nine arts and their attendants and families also derived their livelihood by the grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

This Temple assumed the role of a very big land lord owning vast acres of cultivable lands including many paddy fields. With time, it came to own territories often larger than many of the princely possessions of the land.<sup>2</sup> These lands extended from Shencottah to Thovala (in today's Tamil Nadu) also. The increase in Temple territories, voluntary surrender of the kingly privileges in respect to those lands, increase of the immense rights of the Temple, enormous population growth in those places and high degree of fertility and productivity seen there — all led to the emergence of this Temple as a religious state with defined jurisdiction. Separate plots of land were earmarked for cultivation of flowers required by the Temple and the garden area was called 'Nandavanam'. Trees like jack, mango, coconut etc., were also planted. Consequently the Temple had a large agricultural force at its command. After the land reforms of 1964, the Temple was deprived of its lands and hence this particular role does not fall directly on it though some vicarious links may be seen. Even now some descendants of the families who enjoyed the cultivation of Temple lands, known as its *Pattakkars* (tenants), and who were in turn obliged to render their services to the Temple on occasions prescribed, honour their commitments.

The Temple served as a venue for hearing public grievances and for redressal and corrective action. Even the king, in earlier days, was not exempt from disciplinary action known as *Garva-kettu* apart from other penalties if it was so warranted and would submit to the ruling of the Temple. The episode of the Jesuit priest from Nagercoil who came with a flag outside the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is of interest. His submission was heard by the king and steps were adopted to set matters right.

Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was once situated in a village, as its central point. As the name and fame of the Temple grew, its surroundings too expanded and as in the case of other famed temple cities, the city developed round it. With it appeared its many off shoots like hotels, choultries, road side eating places, street vendors and shops selling all sorts of articles whether they be religious pictures, figures and books, curios, decorative ornaments or flowers, all thriving on the pilgrim influx apart from local patronage. As such, auxiliary small industries too flourished.

The Temple's role as an employer cannot be overlooked. It directly gives daily bread to 177 men and women who are on the permanent pay roll. Temporary and substitute workers are also employed. From early days, it had ample man power and there was detailed designation of duties. Many of the

2. Dr. A. G. Menon — 'History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758'



posts were hereditary. The one hereditary service rendered without any type of monetary compensation is that of the erstwhile rulers of the land, the 'Sree Padmanabha Dasas' whose richest reward is the blessing that provides a chance to serve Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the emotional and spiritual satisfaction derived thereof.

Another modern aspect contributing to prosperity is tourism. Tourists come in large numbers motivated by various reasons to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple even if the regulations and rules of entry restrict many from going inside. The purchasing power of these people of varied degrees helps the guides and small-time business persons. Photography and trade in curios are recent economic spin-offs.

Representations of Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram are seen in the Adayar (Madras) Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and in the Sree Sree Ma Ananda Mayee Ashramam in Haridwar and in the Siva Vishnu Temple in Silver Springs Washington D.C. (USA). Many new temples and *Ashrams* have come up around this Temple with attendant spiritual and economic advantages.

The position of the Temple in the political scenario down the corridors of time has been exceptional. The rulers of the land had all along acknowledged Sree Padmanabha Swamy as their family Deity and tutelary Deity of the Royal Family. The Temple and the Throne were so closely intertwined that their characters overlapped. The Temple was more often than not the final authority by might of Divine right in many matters of administration and vital policy decisions like conquests, succession, adoption into the Royal house etc. With the *Thrippati Danam* of Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma in 925 ME/1750 AD by the Deed of Dedication, he surrendered his entire State to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Thenceforth till the abolition of monarchy by the Government of India, Sree Padmanabha Swamy was the officially accepted Ruler of Travancore. The kings held the office of administration as a sacred trust.

People's participation in all important matters relating to the Temple and consequently to the State too and their approval is a repeatedly recorded fact. It was the earliest form of democratic approach. It may not be considered out of place to emphasize here that the kings and councils apart, the God was vested with the position of being not only the presiding Deity but of being recognised officially by the administration and also the British Government as the constitutional Head of the erstwhile State of Travancore. This state of affairs was unique in India and perhaps in world history too. The pivotal political position of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in the different time frames down the calendar of ages speaks for itself.



## 15

## SEARCH OF SOURCES

## References in Literature

Indian literature like her philosophy is a vast and horizonless ocean cradling in her bosom 'gems of purest ray serene'. As oral bequest initially committed to the mind and memory of man, later on an ever-expanding body of literature took its birth in written form with the *Rig Vedam*<sup>1</sup> of eternal sanctity. The ancient written wisdom of *Bharatha Varsham* was specifically spiritual and philosophic in nature enfolding within its pages the secrets of creation and mysticism. With the march of years this treasurehouse assumed human levels also, embracing the entire graph of evolution of man, his emotions and his aspirations. This massive bulk of literature, which is ever on the increase, doubles as invaluable data on many issues and aspects.

Coming to the subject matter of this book, the *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple* itself, the authenticity of its antiquity is underwritten by its mention in many ancient texts. Long before the Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar or Divakara Muni of the modern age, medieval and pre-medieval works vouch its existence and these include even some among the eighteen *Puranas*. Compiling the material for this chapter has been no simple matter on more counts than one and omissions, if any, may kindly be condoned.

A journey in search of sources through the written pages is without doubt a rewarding experience. The accumulated material comes not only from the home soil but from elsewhere too in remarkable continuity of references in various time slots, languages and styles. Ancient, medieval and modern literature in Sanskrit, Tamil Malayanma and Malayalam appear in prose, poetry and drama. "Right from the Sangam Age down to the end of Sree Swathi Thirunal this continuity is unbroken and no other temple seems to have its history being narrated along with the history of literature as is the case with the Temple at

1. The *Rig Vedam* is said to be the oldest text in the world.



*Syanandoorapura*.”<sup>2</sup> The flow continues unhindered and readies itself to greet the advent of the 21st century. Oral tradition which was carefully cherished and lovingly passed on from generation to generation as well as the *Arangams*, the art forms which the Temple was famous for and which relied on written script, aided in adding to the available literature relating to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

The earliest mentions of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple of Syanandoorapuram appear in many of the eighteen Puranas gifted to the world by Sage Veda Vyasa at the beginning of the Age of Kali. Wherever the actual references are available they have been quoted, though collecting them has been a Herculean effort. This is due to the fact that in a whole volume the reference could be limited to a couple of lines in some cases while in others more material is forthcoming. Still they cannot be dismissed as they represent the time which bore their birth.

The devotion, spiritualism, antiquity, history, royalty, artistry and romance which circumambulate this magnificent Temple of Sree Padmanabha Perumal are truly fascinating and are fondly preserved in the recorded pages for the pulsating present and posterity as an invaluable legacy of the past.

In Indian thought it was deemed as an established matter of merit to gift books – *Pustaka Danam* – and this was executed on a lavish scale in the city of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, which held its own in the areas of learning and scholarship. This is supported by the existence of a large number of manuscripts collected mainly from the Travancore Maharaja's Palace Library and now finding a place in the Oriental Manuscripts Library in Thiruvananthapuram. They seem to have been written during various periods of time but praises of this type of gift (books) have been dwelt upon at length especially in the *Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam* (സ്യാനന്ദൂര പുരാണ സമുച്ചയം) authored a good many centuries back. All the manuscripts contain salutations to the presiding Deity of the Land – Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The salutation, perhaps added some by a scribe, appears either at the beginning or end of the work and reads as *Sree Padmanabho Rakshatu* or “May Sree Padmanabha protect”.

The cumbersome process of tracing the literary evolution of this Temple starts with the period of the *Puranas* wherein the earliest references surface. From then to now the name of the Lord of Syanandoora appears not like fading echoes but like thunderous reverberations sings volumes of the succeeding centuries.

## The Period of the Puranas

*Puranam* literally translate as “That which lives from ancient times”. Out of the eighteen *Maha Puranas* at least six carry references to Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

2. Dr. A.G. Menon – ‘The History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.



## 1. Varaha Puranam

- i) In the following stanza of this *Puranam* the geographical location of the ancient city of *Sree Syanandoora Purusha* is delineated in four lines by the *Varaham*, the 3rd incarnation of Maha Vishnu.

“स्यानन्दूरमिति ख्यातं  
भूमेर्गुह्यं पदं मम  
उत्तरे तु समुद्रस्य  
मलयस्य तु दक्षिणे ॥”

*“I reside in the land which lies south of the Malaya mountain and north of the ocean, which is famed by the name Syanandoora.”*

- ii) The lines given below are said to be from this *Puranam* but it has not been possible to get a specific reference.

“स्यानन्दूरालयेशं फणिपतिशयनं भावये पद्मनाभम् ॥”

*“I worship that Padmanabha who reclines on the serpent Chief in Syanandoora”.*

- iii) In the work titled *Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology*, Vol. 32, chapter 150 dealing with the said *Puranam*, the *Varaham* speaks of the wonder in Syanandoora which is the gold lotus appearing at noon.

“तत्राश्चर्यं प्रवक्ष्यामि  
स्यानन्दूरे यशस्विनि  
सौवर्णं दृश्यते पद्मं  
मध्याह्ने तु दिवाकरे ॥”

There has been a belief about the existence of a ‘golden lotus’ in the *Padma Teertham*, passed on through oral tradition.

*Brahma Teertham* has appeared quite a few times in this *Puranam*. This has been identified as the Mithranandapuram Tank of the said temple which was considered as one of the many *Teerthas* of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Legend has it that the sub soil of this pond was originally churned up by the ‘Pig’ in local jargon, or the *Varaham* Himself (പന്നി കുത്തിയ മണ്ണ്).<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Brahma Puranam

This *Puranam* describes the sanctity of various holy places including *Anantasayana Puram* which is another name for this ancient city. Indra, the chief of the celestials and Chandra, the Moon-God are said to have worshipped at this Temple.

3. Oral tradition as told by Vidvan Sri M.H. Shastri.

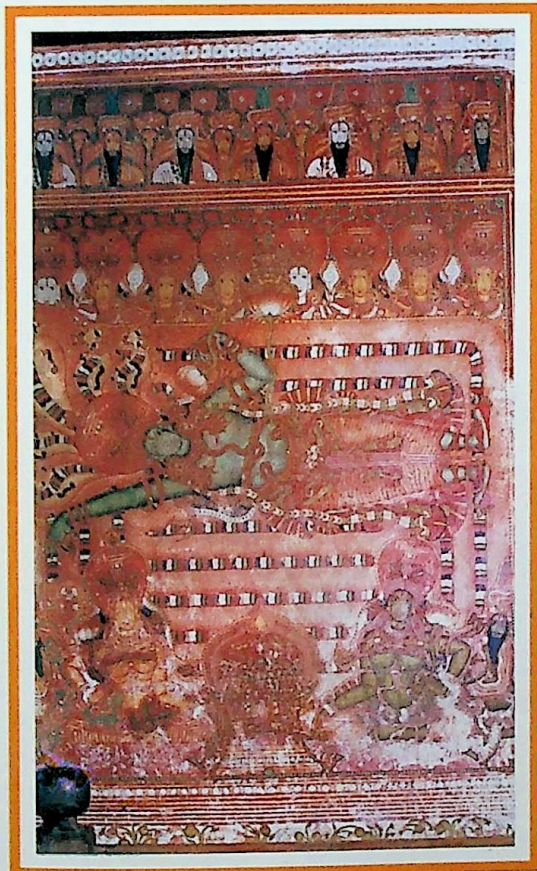




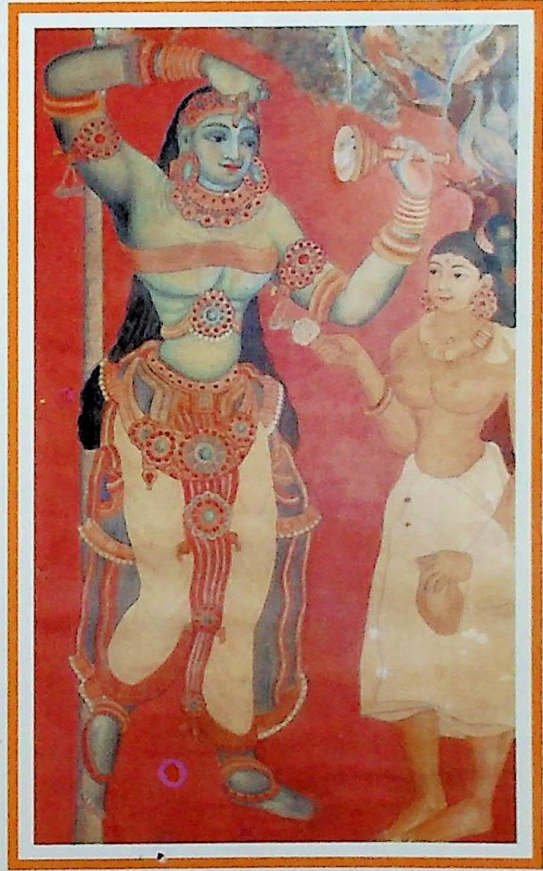
Chandra Valayam  
(Koyikkal Palace, Nedumancaud)



Chandra Valayam  
(without cover)

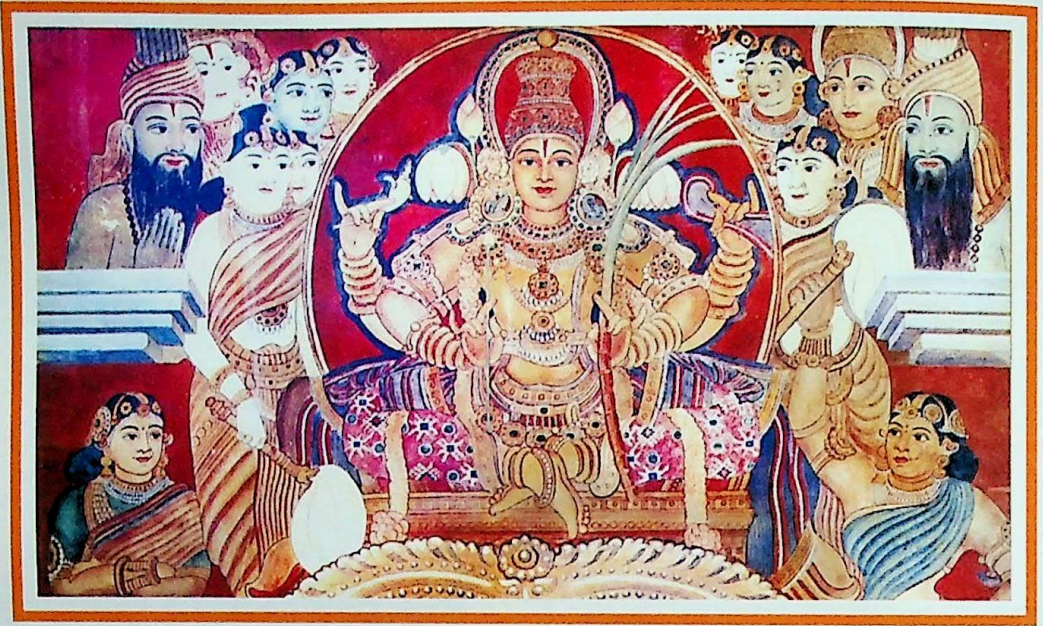


Stylistic Representation of Sree Padmanabha  
Swamy (Padmanabhapuram Mural)



Mural on Yakshi with her dasi  
Southern portion of Western Wall



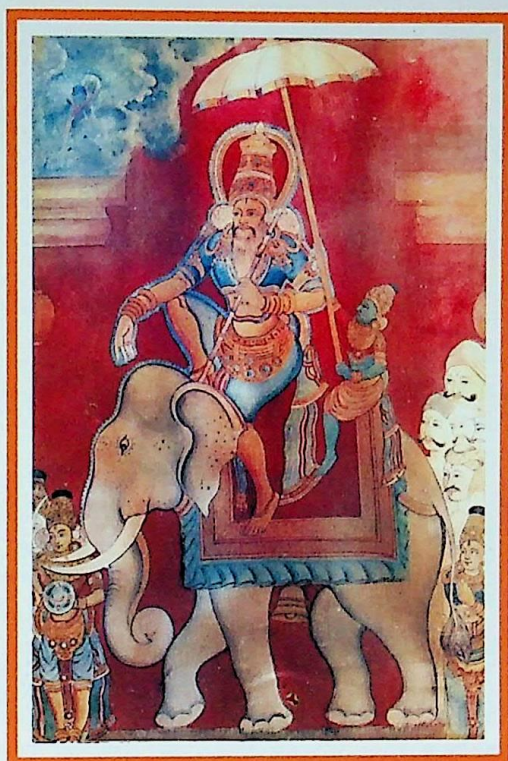


Manmadhan, Mural on the South wall of the Sanctum

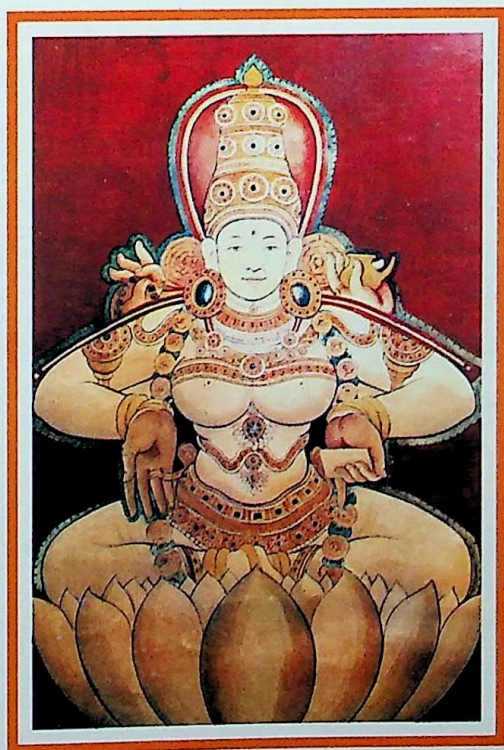


Mural of Raja-Rajeswari on Southern Wall





Mural of Sasta on  
Western Wall

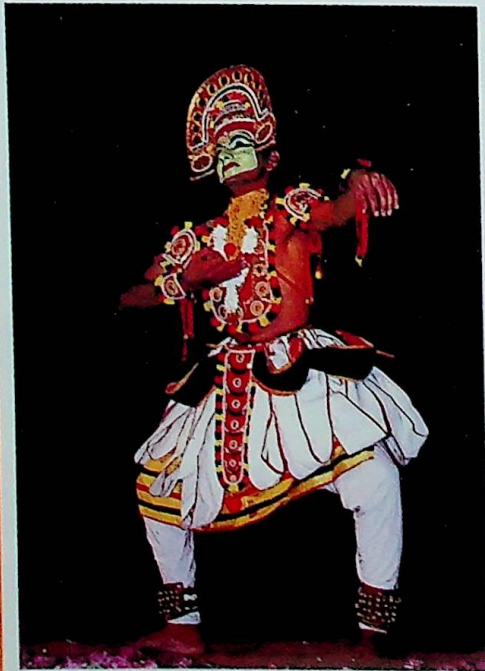


Mural of  
Saraswathy





Typical Kathakali Costume



Ottam Thullal



Dharmaputra at the Painkuni Uthsava





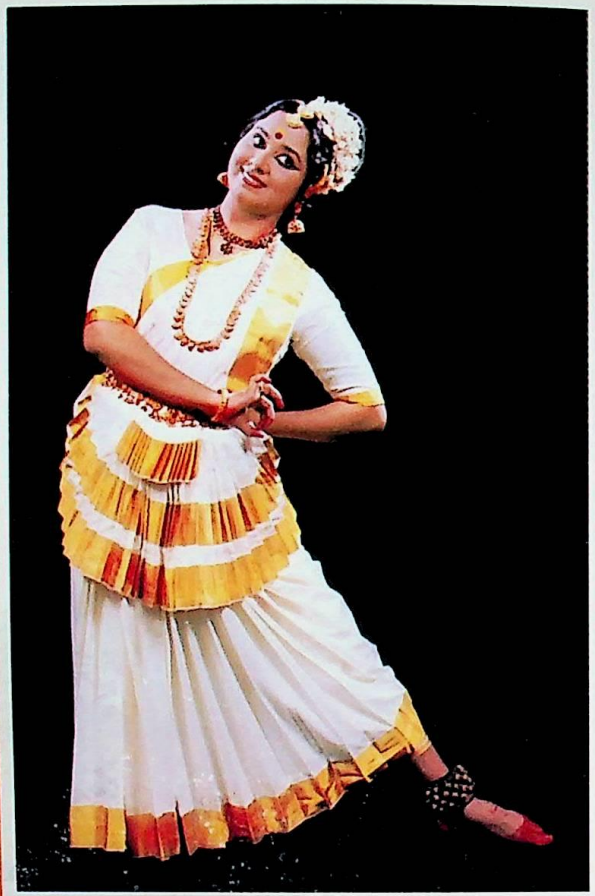
Vela Kali - Mathu Panikkar leads the performers



Thiruvatrakkali



Mohini Attom

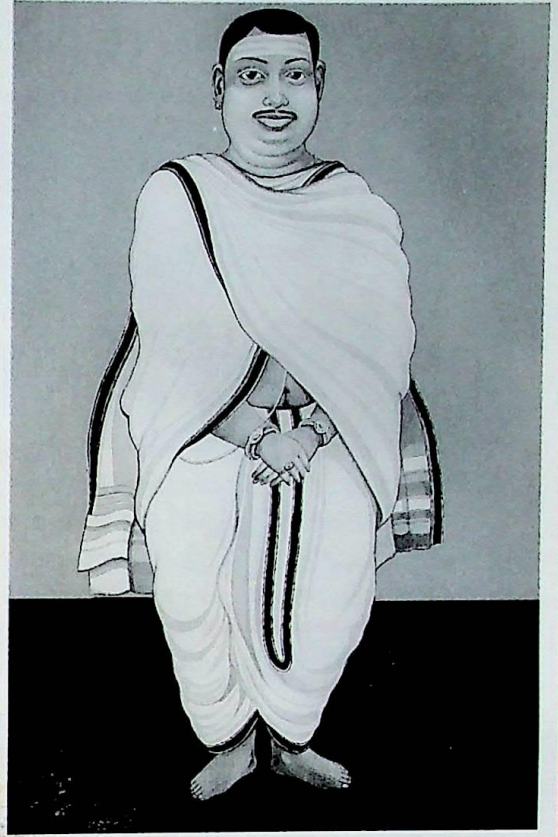


Nangiarkoothu





HariKatha Kalakshepam  
(Meru Bhagavathar)



From Krishnankutty Pulavar's  
book on "Pavakkoothu"





The Executive Officer and Potties (Priests) of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple (2000 April)



Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple Staff



### 3. Brahmanda Puranam

In this sacred text the 'City of *Aanandam*' is frequently mentioned. It could be interpreted either as the 'City of Bliss' (*Aanandam*) or the 'City of Vishnu' one among whose many names is '*Aananda*'. The Lord is repeatedly addressed as '*Syanandoora Purusha*' and His domain '*Syanandoorapura*'. In the *Sree Padmanabha Ashtotharam* of this *Puranam* these lines are found as the hall-mark of the *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple*.

“दक्षिणहस्तेन पूजितशिव

.....

दिवाकरमुनिसेवित”

The significance of these lines requires no elaboration. In the first line the *Puja* done by the Lord to *Sree Siva* with the right hand is stated. It has to be recollected that there appears to be no other known ancient *Vishnu Temple* of fame where *Siva* is provided with such prominence other than the *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple* at *Syanandoora*.

The second line which tells of the service of Sage *Divakara* to the supreme Power underlines the lauded connections of the said personage to this Temple. Both lines apply fully to it.

*Brahmandagolavistharakhyanam* (ബ്രഹ്മാൻഡഗോളവിസ്താരഖ്യാനം) which forms part of this *Puranam* goes in detail about the greatness of *Anantasayanam* in stanzas one to fifteen. An assembly of illustrious sages gathered in *Anantasayanam* and prominently mentioned among them is *Divakara Muni* who used to spend his days in ecstasy of *Krishna Bhakti* or devotion to *Sree Krishna*, which permeated his entire being. The 'legend of the Divine Babe and *Divakara Muni* and his arrival in *Anantankatu* are well-loved narrations of this region and find a place in these pages as well. The only factor to be heavily underlined is that there should be no confusion in the time frame by which this sage be given the later identity of the 9th century or post 9th century AD saint of the same name who is also closely related to this Temple but in its re-consecration.

This section comes under *Anantasayana Mahatmyam*. After obtaining *Darsanam* of God as *Sree Padmanabha Swamy* in the dense forest, the ecstatic sage decorates Him with a garland of beautiful verses. Some of them are of extreme value in this context as they contain graphic descriptions of the Temple and some of its Deities, thus proving that they all existed in this present form from immemorial times.

“मध्यमद्वारि पश्यन्तं नाभिपंकजमुत्तमम्. . . . .”

These lines clearly picturise the mid-area of *Sree Padmanabha Swamy's* reclining form with the lotus arising from the navel as seen through the middle

#### 4. Refer chapter '*Sihala Puranam*'.



door of the main shrine. This also indicates the presence of two more doors on the sides.

“यत्र जातस्त्रिलोकानां स्रष्टा स चतुराननः”

This line reveals the presence of the four-faced Brahma, the Creator of the Universe.

Another couple of lines are included here as most significant.

“अनन्तशयनोऽनन्तपद्मनाभो नृकेसरी  
क्षेत्रस्मिन् भाति देवेशस्त्वदभीष्टं प्रदास्यति ॥”

Here the presence of Sree Narasimha Moorthy, *Nrukesari*, is recorded. Names of many of the *Teerthas* (sacred water sources), which have been related to this Temple for long, are indicated like *Shankhu Teertham*, (on the Shankhumughom Beach), *Chakra Teertham* and *Sree Padmanabha Teertham*. The last one is accepted by scholars as the famous *Padma Teertham*.

Yet another line of importance is given below.

“सर्वलोकाश्रयं देवं श्रीभूमिभ्यां निषेवितम् ॥”

Goddesses Sree or Lakshmi and Bhoomi or the Earth serve as the two forces of Vishnu for the protection of the entire universe.

Such sentences bear testimony that the said aspects including Deities were in no way newer additions. They provide vital historic input in the evolution of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple expanding the area of its antiquity.

#### 4. Padma Puranam

From time immemorial this Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy has been considered as one of the important Vaishnava centres of pilgrimage. In chapter 280, stanza 19 of the *Padma Puranam*, *Anantasayanam* is mentioned along with Mathura, Venkitadri, Sreerangam etc. where Vishnu is ever present.<sup>5</sup> Earlier references appear in the 6th Canto, chapter 110 of this work titled

“धर्मदत्तविष्णुदूतसमागमः”

Verse number eight reads thus:

“स कदाचिदगाद् राजा  
ह्यनन्तशयनं द्विज! ।  
यत्रासौ जगतां नाथो  
योगनिद्रामुपाश्रितः”

Once that King went to *Anantasayanam* where the Lord of the world (Sree Padmanabha) was in *Yoga Nidra*.

5. 1. *Immortal India*, Vol. III, p. 67 – Bhavan's Publication.

2. *K.R. Vaidyanathan – Temples & Legends of Kerala*.



The story is followed up in chapter III. The King mentioned previously is a Chola King. He came to this holy city and did *Puja* to Sree Padmanabha Swamy with gold and many a precious gem. A Brahmin who came later did *Puja* too but with *Thulasi* leaves, which covered the gold and gems offered by the King. This displeased the King and an argument took place on whose *Bhakti* was superior. It proved inconclusive and the King left for his own kingdom. He conducted many ritualistic sacrifices of a lavish nature to propitiate Vishnu while the Brahmin remained in the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy as a *Kshetra Sanyasi* (ascetic of the temple) immersed in worship. To his surprise the King saw the sage being transported to *Vaikuntham* after a long period had elapsed. Realisation then dawned on him that what pleases God is *Bhakti* devoid of ego. Thenceforth he performed austerities in the right spirit, which won for him too a place in the domain of Vishnu.

The usage *Kshetra Sanyasi* is of note as it affirms, even during those early periods, the association of the monastic order, which continues to the present day.

## 5. Skanda Puranam

In this text in part III, *Brahma Kandam* chapter 52 titled *Setu Mahatmyam*, some important places of worship like Gokarnam, Naimisharanyam, Kasi, Dwaraka, Mathura and Sree Padmanabha find merit mention.

“मथुरा पद्मनाभश्च काशी विश्वेश्वरालयः ।”

## 6. Srimad Bhagavatha Puranam

Tenth *Skandham Adhyayam* 79, *Sloka* 18.

This *Puranam* is of enduring fame and popularity, read and re-read by generations.

Balarama (the 8th incarnation of Vishnu), the elder brother of Sree Krishna, sets off on a pilgrimage during the time of the terrible war – the Mahabharatham War, when blood clashed with its own blood. The *Puranam* tells us of his journey to the south of India. After receiving the blessings of Sage Agastya, who was performing austerities, He reached the shores of the southern sea and prayed at the Temple of Durga, identified as Kanyakumari Devi.

In verse 18 His onward pilgrimage to *Phalgun* is stated. During the time of *Vanavasam* when the Pandava brothers resided in the forests for eleven long years, Arjuna is said to have taken off on his own due to various reasons. He reached the southern country and consecrated a Devi temple there. Since *Phalgun* (which is another name of Arjuna) was responsible for the same, this area acquired the name *Phalgun Kshetram* which later on came to be termed as Palkulankara in colloquial jargon. Hence the surrounding areas too



were often referred to as *Phalguna Kshetram*. Geographically Palkulankara is next to the Fort wherein stands the majestic and ancient abode of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Thus *Syanandoorapuri* got invested with this name which is seen, in the *Bhagavatham* too.<sup>6</sup> Balarama on reaching this *Kshetram*, which is described there as the 'city where Vishnu manifested Himself', took a bath in the holy water sources. The term 'Vishnu' is equated here with Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Balarama then took a bath in the *Panchapsaras* held as most holy. The following lines describe the same.

“ततः फाल्गुनमासाद्य  
पञ्चाप्सरसमुत्तमम् ।  
विष्णुः सन्निहितो यत्र  
स्नात्वा स्पर्शद् गवायुतम् ॥”

*Panchapsaras* appears to be a collective term for five tanks of sanctity. They have been variously identified as *Padma Teertham* attached to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, *Shankhu Teertham*, *Varaha Teertham* of Sree Varaham Temple, *Brahma Teertham* connected to the Sree Mithranandapuram Temple and as the last tank certain books cite the Sreekanteswaram Temple tank. While others identify it as *Chakra Teertham* located on the Shankumughom Beach with close affiliation to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple or the one in Varkala.

The conclusion that Vishnu Who manifested Himself is indeed Sree Padmanabha Swamy is derived from the fact that among all the *Teerthas* mentioned only the *Padma Teertham* is linked to a Temple which is purely for Vishnu. All the others relate to His incarnations or to some other Divinity. Moreover all these water sources have been mentioned as *Teerthas* of this Temple, in many instances.

## 7. Matsya Puranam

Reference to this Temple appears in *Anantasayana Prasthavam* of this text.

At the time of the great *Yagam* in holy Naimisharanyam, Saunaka and other sages assembled there requested Sree Veda Vyasa's disciple Soota to impart the greatness of *Anantasayana Kshetram*. Many of the *Teerthas* attached to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple feature in the narration confirming its identity.

Excluding the *Puranas*, the name of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple surfaces in many a volume of varying vintage in a long voyage down the centuries. In some, only a passing mention is noted while some, though brief, are of significance. There are still others wherein the spotlight is on this Temple

6. Pandit P. Gopalan Nair, Commentator, *Sree Maha Bhagavatham*.



itself. Their presentation in these pages posed a problem if they were being considered separately basing them on language and age as some authors have written in more than one language. As such the idea of strict compartmentalisation has been abandoned and while the Tamil works are being taken as one group, the multitude of works in Sanskrit and Malayalam as well as Manipravalam adhere to the yardstick of age alone. Other than the literature available in abundance, the *Churunas* pertaining directly to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, which are so great in number that they stand out as the single largest collection of such records in the world, and the *Granthas* of Travancore Maharaja's Palace Library abound in information about this Temple. The *Churunas* today are partly with the Temple and partly with State Archives and the manuscripts with the Oriental Manuscripts Library. They have already been incorporated in a substantial manner in the history section and appear elsewhere also, so they are not repeated here. The untiring recorded efforts of scholars like Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, P. Shangoonny Menon, V. Nagam Aiya, T.K. Velu Pillai, Padmasree Dr. Sooranadu Kunjan Pillai, Dr. K. Maheswaran Nair, Dr. A. G. Menon etc. act as beacons of brilliance in this field.

Since the Tamil works at hand date earlier than the other texts available, they are being examined first. As is common in most issues reaching back to the far past, at times conflicting opinions arise especially when the aspect of the period is being considered. All the divergent view points are included.

## Tamil Literature and The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple

### I. Pathittu Pathu

This is a well known work of the Sangam Age, 1st or early 2nd century AD, of ten stanzas each, written about ten Chera Kings by ten different poets. The first and the last ten are missing reducing the available verses to eighty instead of the original hundred. The Cheras, it should be remembered, were the ancestors of the present Royal Family of Travancore.

The author of the fourth division is a Brahmin poet by name Kappiyattu Kappiyanar who resided on the banks of the River Kappi. He writes about the Chera ruler known as Kalankaikkanni Naarmudi Cheran.

The opening stanza is a description of a Maha Vishnu shrine and runs thus:

“வண்டு ஊது பொலிதார்  
திரு ஞெமர் அகலத்து  
கண்பொருதிரிகி  
கமழ் குற்றறுழாயலங்கள் செல்வம்”

*“Resplendent God who is adorned with flower garlands, surrounded by buzzing bees and who places Maha Lakshmi on the bosom.”*



*Who holds the weapon of victory which is the Chakram”.*

Neither Sree Padmanabha Swamy nor this city is mentioned but its commentator whose name is unknown states:

“இங்கு செல்வன் என்ற பெயர் திருவனந்தபுரத்து திருமாலைக் குறிக்கும்”

He claims that while ‘*Thirumaal*’ is Maha Vishnu, the term ‘*Selvan*’ denotes Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

In the volume titled *Some Aspects of Kerala and Tamil Literature* by Rao Sahib M. Raghava Aiyangar, under the heading, *The Arat and Tamil Literature* some more material offers itself for scrutiny. The said King was deeply devoted to the God of Thiruvananthapuram whose *Arat* procession he seems to have conducted with great zeal. A graphic description of the *Arat* procession is given in it. Though no specific mention appears of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and this Temple under survey, the details and description clearly point to the same. While immersion or *Arat* in rivers and ponds was common, immersion in the sea was much less in vogue, maybe due to the dearth of great temples located conveniently near the sea.

Stanza 31 in the 4th section is reproduced here in its original Tamil form.

குன்றுதலை மணந்த குழுஉக் கடலுடுத்த  
 மண்கெழு ஞாலத்து மாந்த ரொராங்குக்  
 கைசமந்தலறும் பூசன் மாதிரத்து  
 நால்வேறு நனந்தலை யொருங் கெழுந் தொலிப்பத்  
 தெள்ளாயர் வடிமணி யெறியுநர் கல்லென  
 உண்ணாப் பைஞ் ஞிலம் பனித்துறை மண்ணி  
 வண்டுது பொலிதார்திரு ளெம ரகலத்துக்  
 கண் பொரு திகிரிக் கமழ்குரற் றுழாஅய்  
 அலங்கற் செல்வன் சேவடி பரவி  
 நெஞ்சுமலி யுவகையர் துஞ்சு பதிப்பெயர்  
 மணிநிற மையிரு ளகலநீலா விருபு  
 கோடு கூடி மதிய மியலுற்றாங்குத்  
 துளங்குகுடி விழுத்திணை திருத்திமுரசு கொண்  
 டாண்கடனிறுத்த நின்பூண் கிளன் கிளர் வியண்மார்பு  
 கருவி வானந்தண்தளி தலைஇய்  
 வடதெற்கு விலங்கி விலகுதவைத் தெழிவிய  
 பனிவார் விண்டு விறல் வரையற்றே.

The above lines in translation run as follows. “*Clothed by the seas and dotted with hills lies this part of the earth (the Chera country): here, the voice of multitudes of men lifting their hands and saying prayers fills the air in all directions. As the worship of Lord Vishnu begins, the officiating priests ring*



*the hand bells which send clear peals afar. At this sign the eager, fasting masses bathe in the cold waters of the sea and a bustling noise fills the air. The purificatory bath over, people go to pay their obeisance to the great Lord, who wears garlands rich with the hum of bees on His bosom, besides Goddess Lakshmi, who also resides there. Ever and anon the great Chakram of the Lord (Vishnu) dazzles everybody with its brilliance. Presently, having prayed to the Lord ornamented with fragrant clusters of Thulasi garlands, the crowds go home full of satisfaction in their hearts. As though to gladden these throngs of people on their way home, the well proportioned orb of the moon arises dispelling the black darkness of the scene. Even as the benefaction of the moon, O Chera King, you come to the aid of suffering men of high estate and rule valorously."*

The main aspects that lead the commentator to the conclusion that Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram is the Divinity in question could be two-fold. A great Vaishnavite Temple in Chera country reasonably near the sea shore which could celebrate a grand *Arat* wherein royal participation was also involved, is not at all common. Secondly that the *Arat* was performed in the ocean as against immersion in a river or pond is rare. The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple of Thiruvananthapuram fits the bill on both counts. Apart from that, there is sufficient proof that even in early history, God Sree Padmanabha Swamy journeyed to the sea for His ceremonial bath after the previous day's *Vetta*. The *Chakra Teertham* which is one of the many *Teerthas* of this Temple is located on the beach.

Here it has to be mentioned that there exist controversial view-points on this issue. Thiruvattar Sree Adi Keshava Perumal Temple is cited by some as the possible Temple under review. This claim stands dismissed as there is no sea front at accessible distance around that area. No information is available regarding the *Arat* of this Temple as having taken place in an ocean.

## II. Chilappathikaram

This masterpiece of enduring fame is attributed to different time frames. Tamil scholars variously relate it to the Sangam Age, i.e. the 1st or early 2nd century AD or between the 4th and the 7th century AD. Its royal author, Ilankovadikal, who was brother to Cheran Chenkuttuvan, the Pandyan King who features in this work, later on went to Kodungalloor and the Second Chera Empire, ancestors to the present Royal Family of Travancore, was connected to him. This epic like *Maha Kavyam* is in poetic style. It is also the first among the five *Maha Kavyas* in old Tamil literature.

Cheran Chenkuttuvan readies for a war of conquest with the ruling heads of North India. For this purpose he has *Prasadam* brought to him from the Temples in Chera territory.



## சிலப்பதிகாரம்

குடக்கோ குட்டுவன் கொற்றம் கொள்கென  
ஆடக மாடத்து அரிதுயில் அமர்ந்தோன்  
சேடம் கொண்டு, சிலர் நின்று ஏத்த  
தெண்ணீர் கரந்தசெஞ்சடைக் கடவுள்  
வண்ணச் சேவடி மணிமுடி வைத்தலின்  
ஆங்கு. அது வாங்கி அணிமணிப் புயத்துத்  
தாங்கினான்.

.....  
ஆடகமாடம் - திருவனந்தபுரம்  
இரவிபுரம் என்பாரும் உளர்.

The above lines are taken from chapter XX verses 62/63. While there is no mention either of Sree Padmanabha Swamy or Thiruvananthapuram in a specific manner in these lines, evaluators are united in maintaining that the Temple involved is none other than the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy at Thiruvananthapuram.

A Vishnu devotee from the domain of the Chera rulers comes to the Pandyan Court singing praises of the Pandyan King. He brings with him *Prasadam* from a great Vishnu temple including a garland of *Thulasi* leaves. (It may be pointed out that in the present too *Thulasi* leaf garlands are among the different items of *Prasadams* given in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple). The devotee refers to the Temple as 'Golden Temple'.

According to the reputed scholar and first known commentator of this work, who is named *Orumpada Uttai Arashiyar* (ഈമ്പാദ ഉതൈ അരശിയർ), the Temple in question is the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple at Syanandoori and not to be confused with the other famous Vishnu Temple with established Chera connections, the Sree Adi Keshava Perumal Temple in Thiruvattar. Arashiyar explains the basis of his conclusion stressing on the following terms *Atakamatom* (ആടകമാടം), which translates as *Swarna Kshetram* or 'Golden Temple', wherein *Arithuyil Amernthon* (അരിതൂയിൽ അമർത്തോൻ) which means *Yoga Nidra* or cosmic conscious slumber in which Maha Vishnu rests apply totally to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

The commentator points out that the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was famous for its gold-covered or plated exterior and this fact derives authenticity due to repeated mention of the same in writings and records pertaining to different periods of time. The concept of *Yoga Nidra* coupled with the mention of the golden outer areas lend support to establishing the identity of the God as Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Syanandoorapuram. The narration goes on to



state that though the Pandyan King was a great devotee of Lord Siva "one who received the holy feet of Him with red matted locks (Siva) on his head" this self-same King "received this Prasadam from Atakamatom Vishnu Temple with full veneration and in all humility carried it over his shoulder in a cloth (bundle) decorated with bells and proceeded on his way."

### III. Divya Prabandham – Thiruvaymozhi

Tamil Vaishnavite devotional literature flowered in with the fullest fragrance with the advent of the twelve great Vaishnavite saints known as *Alvars*. It will not be out of place to add here that one among them was *Kulasekhara Alvar*, author of *Mukunda Mala*, who was a sovereign of Venad during the II<sup>nd</sup> Chera Empire.

Early 9th century AD stood witness to the life of Nammalvar, the 12th, last and as is popularly held, the greatest saint in the *Alvar* tradition. In *Thiruvaymozhi*, which represents the whole volume of *Alvar* religious literary outpourings, Nammalvar has sung in ecstasy of the thirteen famed Vishnu Maha Kshetras of the then Malayala Nadu (land of the Malayalam people). These temples had already been identified among the 108 *Divya Desams* or places of special divinity in *Bharatham* in the *Four Thousand Divya Prabandham* of the *Alvar* sages. Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple which had been identified as one among the 13 or in a more extensive projection as the 59th among the 108, necessarily features in this sage's renderings. Eleven stanzas were composed by him on the Lord of this Temple, ten being the actual subject matter and the last being the *Phala Sruti*, which speaks of the effect of perusing these verses.

It is interesting that certain areas of this city mentioned by Nammalvar can be still located though with a different character and names like the *Punnamara Thoppu*, which is today's Swathi Nagar inside the Fort.

Nammalvar pours out his devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy standing at the feet of the Lord. Some scholars use the very fact of this saint's presence in this Temple to disprove the existence of Siva claiming that Siva must have been a later addition to the Divinities as this staunch Vaishnavite would not have gone for worship in a place where Siva was venerated. Cult-clashes and extremes in ideology and worship were deep-rooted in those times.

This author begs to differ on this point. It has to be remembered that Nammalvar refused to approach the door only through which the crown of the reclining God could be visible, explaining his action by stating that Lakshmi Devi alone had the right to that place. It could well have been for a second reason also, i.e., the presence of Siva. He could have diplomatically avoided the situation by offering this justification. The very fact that he omitted that one entrance even if it resulted in limiting his *Darsanam* in total visual concept lends strength to the presence of Siva then.



Since the verses are only eleven in number dealing totally with the subject matter of this book and since they are authored by such an acclaimed sage who lived far back, they are being included here as such:

## கெடுமிடர்

திருவனந்தபுரத்தைச் சேர்ந்தால்  
பரம்பதத்திற் போலத் தொண்டு  
செய்யலாம் என்று கூறுதல்

பண்: இந்தளம்)

(தாளம்: ஏழொத்து

1. கெடுமிட ராயவெல்லாம் கேசவா வென்ன, நாளும்  
கொடுவினை செய்யும்கூற்றின் தமர்களும் குங்ககில்லார்.  
விடமுடை யரவில்பள்ளி விரும்பினான் கரும்பலற்றும்.  
தடமுடை வயலனந்த புரநகர்ப் புகதுமின்றே. க
2. இன்றுபோய்ப் புகுதிராகி லெழுமையும் ஏதம்சாரா,  
குன்றுநேர் மாடமாதே குருந்துசேர் செருத்திபுன்னை.  
மன்றலர் பொழிலனந்த புரநகர் மாயன் நாமம்.  
ஒன்றுமோ ராயிரமாய் உள்ளுவார்க் கும்பருரே. உ
3. ஊரும்புட் கொடியுமஃதே யுலகெல்லா முண்டுமிழ்ந்தான்  
சேரும்தண் ணனந்தபுரம் சிக்கெனப் புகுதிராகில்.  
தீரும்நோய் வினைகளெல்லாம் திண்ணநாம் அறியச் சொன்னோம்  
பேரும்ஓ ராயிரத்துள் ஒன்றுநீர் பேசுமினே.ங
4. பேசுமின் கூசமின்றிப் பெரியநீர் வேலைகுழ்ந்து.  
வாசமே கமழுஞ்சோலை வயலணி யந்தபுரம்  
நேசம்செய் துறைகின்றானை நெறிமையால் மலர்கள் தூவி.  
பூசனை செய்கின்றார்கள் புண்ணியம் செய்தவாறே. ச
5. புண்ணியம் செய்துநல்ல புனலோடு மலர்கள் தூவி,  
எண்ணுமி னெந்தைநாமம் இப்பிறப் பறுக்குமப்பால்,  
திண்ணம்நாம் அறியச்சொன்னோம் செறிபொழில் அனந்தபுரத்து.  
அண்ணலார் கமலபாதம் அணுகுவார் அமரராவார். ரு
6. அமரராய்த் திரிகின்றார்கட் காதிசேர் அனந்தபுரத்து.  
அமரர்கோன் அர்ச்சிக்கின்றங் ககப்பணி செய்வார்விண்ணோர்.  
நமர்களே! சொல்லக்கேண்மின் நாமும்போய் நணுகவேண்டும்.  
குமரனார் தாதைதுன்பம் துடைத்தகோ விந்தனாரே. சு
7. துடைத்தகோ விந்தனாரே யுலகுயிர் தேவும்மற்றும்.  
படைத்தவம் பரமமூர்த்தி பாம்பணைப் பள்ளிகொண்டான்.  
மடைத்தலை வாளைபாயும் வயலணி யனந்தபுரம்.  
கடைத்தலை சீய்க்கப்பெற்றால் கடுவினை களையலாமே. எ



8. கடுவினை களையலாகும் காமனைப் பயந்தகாளை,  
இடவகை கொண்டதென்பர் எழிலணி யனந்தபுரம்.  
படமுடை யரவில்பள்ளி பயின்றவன் பாதம்காண,  
நடமினோ நமர்களுள்ளீர்! நாமுமக் கறியச்சொன்னோம். அ
9. நாமுமக் கறியச்சொன்ன நாள்களும் நணியவான,  
சேமநன் குடைத்துக்கண்டீர் செறிபொழி லனந்தபுரம்.  
தூமநல் விரைமலர்கள் துவளற ஆய்ந்துகொண்டு.  
வாமனன் அடிக்கென்றேத்த மாய்ந்தறும் வினைகள்தாமே.
10. மாய்ந்தறும் வினைகள்தாமே மாதவா என்ன, நாளும்  
ஏய்த்தபொன் மதிளனந்த புரநக ரெந்தைக்கென்று.  
சாந்தமொடு விளக்கம்தூபம் தாமரை மலர்கள் நல்ல.  
ஆய்ந்துகொண் டேத்தவல்லார் அந்தமில் புகழினாரே. க
11. அந்தமில் புகழனந்த புரநகர் ஆதிதன்னை,  
கொந்ததலர் பொழில்குருகூர் மாறன்சொல் லாயிரத்துள்.  
ஐந்தினோ டைந்தும்வல்லார் அணைவர்போய் அமருலகில்.  
பைந்தொடி மடந்தையார்தம் வேய்மரு தோளினையே கக

The meaning in English is as follows:

1. The utterance of the term 'Kesava' just once is sufficient to drive away all troubles. Even the emissaries of *Yama*, who is the Lord of Death, will not approach the devotee who chants this holy name. In the sacred city which abounds in lush fields and lakes and which is known as *Anandapura*, Sree Narayana Bhagavan reigns with great joy as *Anantasayee* (One reclining on Ananta). Let us at once proceed to that hallowed place.
2. There are buildings in Anandapuram/Thiruvananthapuram which are as tall as hills. Trees like *Kurunthu* (Hiptage Bengalensis) *Cherinthi* (Abutilsh Medicus) *Punna* (Mastwood) as well as gardens with profusion of scented blooms are found there. For seven births and more there are no woes for the residents of this city as well as for pilgrims who come here. The name of the Lord who presides over this land is equal to the thousand holy names. The benefit derived from chanting the *Sahasranamam* (thousand names) of God is obtained by reciting one single name of this Lord or 'Perumal'.
3. Our hero is He who has the *Garuda Vahanam* (Garuda Bird as vehicle) and the flag sporting the symbol of this bird. He is one who contains everything within Himself and thus saves all the worlds of this universe during the time of *Pralayam* or great flood marking the end of the cosmos. Once this action of annihilation concludes it is He who brings forth



from Himself the cycle of creation once again. If one goes to the land blessed with cool clime where this *Bhagavan* (God) resides, he gets liberated from all sorrows and sins. I repeatedly stress this aspect for your enlightenment. Enjoy the greatness of this Lord by reciting at least one of His thousand names.

4. Anantapuram which is blessed by the sea, water paths and fields is greatly favoured by Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Those who worship Him who rules here in all glory, in a manner laid down by the scriptures, become blessed souls.
5. With real devotion perform *Archana* (worship with flowers) and *Abhishekam* (oblation with waters made sacred) and immerse yourself in the thought of God. That will be the salvation from the grief of the cycle of birth and death. Those who have the great good fortune of getting *Darsanam* of His lotus feet will surely attain the place of the Divine in future.
6. When Sree Parameswara, father of Sree Subramonya Swamy, faced a dire situation from the demon known as Banasura (Bhasmasura). He was saved by Govinda, who is Sree Padmanabha. This Supreme Power is the origin of all celestials and Indra, the King of these gods, does worship Him here. All these divine hordes come here daily for worship. Let us also pay our respects to these devotees like the Devas, immersed in the service of this Lord.
7. Sree Govinda is the destroyer of the universe. He is also the creator of the multitudinous worlds and divinities. He assumes *Yoga Nidra* on Adi Sessa the serpent. Even great sins will release us and move away if we put our feet at the entrance of the Temple at the city of Ananthapuram which possesses lakes and canals in which the *Varali* fish prance and play and which has an abundance of fields.
8. In the city by name Ananthapuri which is the repository of enchantment, the creator of the god of beauty, who is known as *Manmathan*, as Sree Padmanabha Swamy, who is radiant with youth and loveliness permanently dwells. Let us all proceed immediately to get the vision of and worship at the sacred feet of that God who grants *Darsanam*, reclining on *Ananta* with hoods spread out. This is indeed the ideal place to obtain liberation from the great sins of accumulated births.
9. The life span of man decreases with the progress of time; as such worship should never be delayed to another hour. Ananthapura is a blessed place. Go to the Temple after collecting flowers for *Puja* and other commodities required for worship. Submit flowers to be utilised for venerating the



feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy who incarnated as Vamana and stand with hands folded in homage. All your sins will vanish.

10. The very moment one pays obeisance to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and calls out 'Madhava', all sins will cease to exist. As such one can always live in an illustrious manner if one is able to gain the great fortune of daily visiting this Temple thatched with gold, carrying sandal, flowers like lotus and other items with them. Ever after they attain union with God (on casting off mortal coils), they will be remembered by the world and attain glory.

## Phala Sruthi

11. Nammalvar who goes by many names like Sathakopan, Maran and so on has rendered a thousand verses in praise of Vishnu. Those who read these ten stanzas of homage among this collection, dedicated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy will attain *Vaikuntham* (the abode of Vishnu) on forsaking the human body. There divine-born damsels will receive them and welcome them and serve them as their slaves.

## Thiruananthai Thalavilasam

The author of this poetic work in Tamil was a reputed scholar by name Sankara Subramonya Kavirayar from Ramanad District of Tamil Nadu a contemporary of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal. The Maharaja is seen to have greatly honoured him for his expertise in literature. The age of the work in question is given as 1022 ME/1847 AD. It deals exhaustively with various aspects and events of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in what could be termed as a holistic presentation.

It dwells on the decorations and is all praise for the dedicated musical *Seva* of the instrumentalists as well as for the women with lamps who serve their Lord in a spirit of worship. The *Simhasana Vahanam* is described as 'gem-studded' and 'radiant like a thousand moons'. It is interesting to note that this author has calculated the total number of pillars in the *Sivelippura* as 360 and a quarter which differs from the commonly accepted number. The glory of the *Brahma Kalasam* is such that the sun and the moon are present to witness it. The book states that the nature of the *Puja* is *Shodasa Puja*. Another aspect which had all along enhanced the fame of the Temple is mirrored in the succeeding lines. Just as the housewife would invite others to partake food to the fill at her house, the Temple extended a standing invitation with all courtesy to people to take the food of Sree Padmanabha to their heart's content.

“மாபெரும் ஆதிசேடன்மீது பள்ளிகொண்டுள்ள ஸ்ரீ பத்மநாப ஸ்வாமி யின் திருப்பாதங்களை ஒற்றைக்கல் மண்டபத்தில் நிற்குகொண்டு பக்தியுடன் சேவிப்பவர்கள் பூமியில் மீண்டும் பிறவார்.”



Those devotees will never have rebirth who with great piety and concentrated devotion worship from the single-stone *Mandapam*, the feet of the great God Sree Padmanabha who is lying on the mighty Adi Sesha.

The available Tamil works being over, the much larger volume of Sanskrit, Malayalam and other works are being brought under scrutiny according to the seniority of centuries.

## Vintage Literature in other Languages

### Samkshepashaareerakam (സംക്ഷേപശാരീരകം)

The author of this significant work goes by the name Sarvajnatman. Much scholarly research has gone into the identity of the author and the king of his times (held variously as Chera or Chola) with whom he had connections. While no consensus of opinion has been arrived at, the view reflected in certain authorative texts has been accepted here. The probable date of Sree Adi Sankara reads as between 655-687 AD.<sup>7</sup> Though one is unable to state the exact time slot, it is deduced that Sarvajnatman comes later, perhaps around the 9th or 10th century. Based on inference and available data he is stated to be of the *Parampara* (പരമ്പര) of Sureswaraacharya, a prime pupil of Sree Adi Sankara, founder of the *Naduvil Madhom* at Thrissur. Sarvajnatman occupied the position of Pushpanjali Swamiyar of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and hailed from the above mentioned hermitage from where the Swamiyars continue to be deputed from time long gone for performing daily *Pushpanjali* at this great Temple. *Sarvajnatmayatis* links with Thiruvananthapuram are unanimously accepted even as the Sage proclaims God Sree Padmanabha as his favourite Deity.<sup>8</sup>

The lines quoted below from this work prove revealing.

“अविरलपदपङ्क्तिः पद्मनाभस्य पुण्या  
चरणकमलधूलिग्राहिणी भारतीयम् ।  
घनतरमुपघातं श्रेयसः श्रोतृसंघात्  
सुरसरिदिव सद्यो मार्ष्टु माङ्गल्यहेतुः ॥”

S.S. IV. 61

*‘Let this Bharati (the book Samkshepashaareerakam) having continuity of verse (like the ceaseless flow of the Ganga), possessed of the pollen of the holy lotus feet of Sree Padmanabha, the most auspicious One, wipe off in a trice the dense darkness of ignorance from the listeners, like the divine Ganga (originating from Sree Padmanabha’s feet) which washes away the sins of those who immerse themselves in her).’*

7. Dr. Chintamani – Date of Sankara and other texts.

8. Dr. E. Eswaran Nampoothiry – ‘Introduction to the Pramanalakshnam of Sarvajnatmayati’ – Edited Kerala University Sanskrit Department Publication No. 8, 1973.



Another literary evidence found in the concluding stanzas of the same text and which cannot be overlooked, relates to the lines of praise of Sree Narasimha Swamy installed in the southern shrine of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. They command exceptional importance being the first recorded literary evidence available pertaining to this Deity thus establishing His presence before that age.

“भुजङ्गमाङ्गशायिने विहङ्गमाङ्गगामिने  
तुरङ्गमाङ्गभेदिने नमो रथाङ्गधारिणे ।  
सुरासुरात्मसंघयोः सुखेतरप्रदं हरे-  
र्वपुर्नृसिंहमद्भुतं नमामि सर्वसाक्षिणम् ॥”

S.S. IV. 63

*‘Obeisance to that great Vishnu who reclines on the serpent Ananta, who rides the bird Garuda, who possesses in His hand the Chakrayudham and who tore apart the body of the demon Hayagriva. I also bow down before that marvellous Narasimha form of Hari which strikes terror in the hearts of Suras (Devas) and Asuras (demons) alike and who also remains as the one witness (Sakshi) of all beings.’*

## Guru Parampara Prabhavam

This is an ongoing work originating around 10th century AD containing the contributions of many and is in Sanskrit. There is mention of Yamunacharya, a great Vaishnava Acharya, having been away at Thiruvananthapuram, possibly on a pilgrimage (as it was rare in those days to undertake journeys to distant places if no pilgrimage was involved) when his *Guru* expired at Sreerangam. As such he was unable to keep the promise made to the *Guru* to be at his bedside during his last moments.

Though the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is not mentioned as such the inference by certain scholars is that it is involved.

## Keralaachara Deepika

Written in Sanskrit and believed to be by Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar and hence attributed to the 9th century by some, it is a work of sizable proportions, divided into three sections. In *Kerala Kshetra Mahatmyam*, which comes first, this Temple under survey is mentioned. There is a clarification that the consecrated Divinity is *Anantasayee*.

“अनन्तपुरनाथश्च  
शेषशायी हि शोभते ॥”

*“The Lord of Anantapura presents Himself in all effulgence as Seshasayee, One who rests on the Serpent”.*



## Suka Sandesam

This *Sandesa Kavyam* in Sanskrit dating to the 10th or 11th century AD is authored by Lakshmi Dasa, a Namboodiri Brahmin of *Karingapalli Mana*. These types of works, which are considerable, feature a messenger — a bird, a bee, a human being<sup>9</sup> — who would carry the message of love from the lover to his beloved or vice versa, on being separated from the partner. Invariably a descriptive account of the route this messenger has to follow will also be detailed to help him on his way.

In the *Poorva Bhagam* (former half) of this work, from verse 40 to verse 50, the Maha Vishnu Temple at Syanandoora is spoken about. It proceeds to present a detailed description of the city which inevitably includes this Temple. Significant is the mention of the two Goddesses near the Lord thus substantiating their age of existence prior to that time. This work is all praise for the prosperity of the city and affirms that it is the most pleasing place to live in.

“आनन्दिष्यत्यनघ नितरामन्तरात्मा यतस्ते  
स्यानन्दूरं पुरवरमितो नातिदूरे मुरारेः ।  
पौरन्दर्या विजयति पुरस्सम्पदं यत्र देवः  
स्वैरं दारैस्सह विहरते भार्गवीकाश्यपीभ्याम् ॥”

*“Oh meritorious parrot! Since the glorious city of Ananthapuram is not far off from here, your soul will thrill with pleasure (on going there). God Sree Padmanabha resides in comfort with His wives Lakshmi and Bhoomi Devies in that city which conquers in wealth even the city of Indra.”*

He goes on to affirm that it is the seat of God whose devotees, *Yogies* (enlightened souls) and *Bhogies* (materialistically inclined souls) are sure to attain bliss.

“पुण्यं क्षेत्रं पुरमुरुसुखं योगिनां भोगिनां च ।”

## Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam

This invaluable text in Sanskrit in manuscript form was donated to the Oriental Manuscripts Library by Maharaja Chithira Thirunal from his own Palace Library. Written around 342 ME/1167 AD as is popularly accepted, it is the most authoritative record of this Temple. In the body of the *Samuchayam* itself it is stated that this work was completed on the 25th day of the Kali year 4269. While many details are provided in the text of this magnificent work, the actual name of the author evades detection. He was a dependant of King Udaya Marthanda Varma and was his court poet. Some lines reveal that he hailed

9. *Imitating the famous work of the immortal Sanskrit poet Kalidasa wherein the cloud is the messenger.*



from Manigrama in Tulu country and that he was the son of Vishnu and the pupil of Madhavan and a Tulu Brahmin (*Embran*). There is nothing extraordinary in a Tulu Brahmin residing on a permanent basis in Thiruvananthapuram, which contained the largest concentration of this community in Malayala Nadu due to the existence of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Important offices in the Temple like those of the Periya Nambi and Panchagavyathu Nambi were traditionally filled by them. It is to be noted that the Tulu Brahmins first appeared in this far off south as functionaries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and in course of time have expanded so much that they form the largest priestly class in Kerala second only to the Namboodiri Brahmins. It should not be overlooked that Divakara Muni is believed by the majority of evaluators to have direct roots in Tulu Brahminism.

This work attempts to present the *Puranic* and historical aspects of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and is a mine of source materials for the history of the Temple with which the history of Travancore is closely associated.

Udaya Marthanda Varma was the scholarly and illustrious patron of this poet and the son of Kotha/Goda Varma who has otherwise found no real place in the political history of the land. The work was completed and presented at the full court of Udaya Marthanda Varma, whose brother Veera Kotha Kerala Varma is later on seen to have had a say in the rule of the fair land of *Velavishaya*. This is the Sanskrit rendering of the vernacular name Velnadu from which is derived the popular term Venad. Thereafter it was taken up for daily chanting in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

This work is an undisputed landmark dealing with the historiography of Travancore during the period it is set in. Data gleaned from its extensive description has been given a five-fold classification as Temple history, political history, social history, political geography and cultural history.

The geographical borders have been thus defined:

“यदुत्तरं दक्षिणसिन्धुराजाद्  
यद्दक्षिणं वा मलयान्महाद्रेः ।  
प्रत्यक् च यत् कुण्डमवच्छिनत्ति  
पैतामहं प्राक् च सरिद्घृतस्रक् ॥”

The country north of the southern sea, south of the Malaya mountain, west of the Paitamahakundam and east of the seas has been specified as the *Kshetram* of Sree Padmanabha. It is presumed to cover Malayachalam as today's Malayankeezhu, Ghruthamala, River Neyyar and Brahmakundam or Varkala. The areas bounded by the Neyyar and Varkala fell within the orbit of the Travancore rulers as has been historically proved.



The *Samuchayam* runs into twenty five chapters devoted to various subjects with a highly significant colophon throwing light on politics and history as well. They are:

1. Syanandoorapurakshetra - varnanam (സ്യാനന്ദൂരപുരക്ഷേത്ര വർണ്ണനം)
2. Padmanabhasayana - varnanam (പദ്മനാഭശയനവർണ്ണനം)
3. Padmanabharadhanakathanam (പദ്മനാഭരാധനകഥനം)
4. Syanandoorapura - Maryada - Brahmakundavarnanam (സ്യാനന്ദൂരപുര-  
മര്യാദാ-ബ്രഹ്മകുണ്ഡവർണ്ണനം)
5. Tanmaryada - varnanam (തന്മര്യാദ വർണ്ണനം)
6. Agasthyakunda - Pitrateertha varnanam (അഗസ്ത്യകുണ്ഡ പിതൃതീർഥ  
വർണ്ണനം)
7. Surpakara - Varaha - Ramasarovarnanam (ശുർപാകര വരാഹ രാമസരോ  
വർണ്ണനം)
8. Ananta - Kanva - Saptarshikundankavthateertha - varnanam (അനന്ത-  
കബ-സപ്തർഷികുണ്ഡാങ്കവതതീർഥ വർണ്ണനം)
9. Jatakunda varnanam (ജടകുണ്ഡ വർണ്ണനം)
10. Chakrateertha - varnanam (ചക്രതീർഥ വർണ്ണനം)
11. Teerthasnanavidhih (തീർത്ഥസ്നാനവിധി:)
12. Vidyadanavidhih (വിദ്യാദാനവിധി:)
13. Gobhuhiranyadanaprasamsanam (ഗോഭൂഹിരണ്യദാനപ്രശംസനം)
14. Kanyadanaprasamsanam (കന്യാദാനപ്രശംസനം)
15. Annatoyadanaprasamsanam (അന്നതോയദാനപ്രശംസനം)
16. Kshetravasaniyamavidhih (ക്ഷേത്രവാസനിയമവിധി:)
17. Padmanabhayogopanyasavarnanam (പദ്മനാഭയോഗോപന്യാസവർണ്ണനം)
18. Kshetralaksana- Brahmanamahatmyam  
(ക്ഷേത്രലക്ഷണ-ബ്രഹ്മണമാഹാത്മ്യം)
19. Kshetralaksanam (ക്ഷേത്രലക്ഷണം)
20. Jambukopakhyanam (ജംബുകോപാഖ്യാനം)
21. Syanandooraprastavah (സ്യാനന്ദൂരപ്രസ്താവ:)
22. Kshetrasamarthyniroopanam (ക്ഷേത്രസാമർത്ഥ്യ നിരൂപണം)
23. Syanandoorapurapujotsavavarnanam (സ്യാനന്ദൂരപുര പൂജോത്സവവർണ്ണനം)
24. Belisevaprasamsanam (ബലിസേവാപ്രശംസനം)
25. Kshetrasamarthyaikadesaprasamasanam (ക്ഷേത്രസാമർത്ഥ്യൈകദേശ  
പ്രശംസനം)



The first chapter provides a general account of the Temple. Even if the *Samuchayam* does not dwell on the distinctive aspects and wonders of this Temple at length, certain valuable information is available. The poet has taken a lot of pains to explain the place name Syanandoora laying stress on the term *Aanandam*. According to the etymology worked out by the author, this place came to be known by that name because the ancient sages considered *Aanandam* (bliss) as not far off from there.<sup>10</sup> According to Upanishadic seers, since *Aanandam* is identical with *Brahman* or Sree Padmanabha, Syanandoorapuram or Aananthapuram can be considered as the seat of 'Bliss' being *Brahman* Itself.

The second chapter contains a description of the main Deity as reclining Sree Padmanabha. Iconographic details are included. It describes the Deity as four-armed, reclining atop Ananta the Serpent in *Yoga Nidra*. The Idol that we see today has only two hands. Since there appears to be no mention of the other shrines like Narasimha, Vyasa, Krishna, Sashta and so on, they might have been installed at a later time. This work is also silent about Vilvamangalathu Swamiyar and Divakara Muni. They might have been posterior to this work though Vilvamangalam is assigned to the 9th century. At the same time the tale of a *Jambookam* (fox) which got salvation through its devotion appears in the *Samuchayam*.

Another very valuable information is that Veera Kotha Kerala Varma, the youngest brother of the then King, carried out some renovations in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple along with the ruler King Udaya Marthanda Varma. References to the same read as *Abhinaveekritapadmanabhasan-mandirothama Gunagraja Keralena* (അഭിനവീകൃതപദ്മനാഭസ്ഥാനിരോത്തമ ഗുണാഗ്രജ കേരളേന). The nature of the actual repairs remains unspecified.

In the third chapter the worship to Sree Padmanabha - *Padmanabhasadhanam* is dealt with.

In the fourth and fifth chapters the limits of the city called Syanandoora are described. The presence of the sea is noted.

Sixth, seventh and eighth chapters list out and describe the various *Teerthas* or sacred water sources within these boundaries as well as those outside them which directly relate to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as is supported by other works also. This information is important politically as well, as many of them are located far away from the actual city thereby once again underlining the expanding outer limits of this Temple. The number is twelve as given in this manuscript though it is more in some other texts. As far as possible, these *Teerthas* have been identified with present day names.

10. Dr. A.G. Menon - 'History of Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple Till 1758'.



1. *Ananta Teertham* – *Padma Teertham* which is the famous tank of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
2. *Agastya Teertham* – Sree Mithranandapuram Temple tank in the Fort with its ancient ongoing links with the Temple. (This tank is also known as *Brahma Teertham*).
3. *Varaha Teertham* – Sree Sreevaraham Temple tank just outside the Fort walls.
4. *Chakra Teertham* – *Chakrathal Kadavu*, Thirumala, Thiruvananthapuram, the Shanghumukhom Beach *Teertham* or the *Teertham* by the same name in Varkala.
5. *Surpakara Teertham* – Thiruvallom river famous for last rites.
6. *Pithru Teertham* – Sree Parasurama Temple tank Thiruvallom (crores of sacred fish believed to be manifestations of Sree Padmanabha Swamy are seen there).
7. *Rama Teertham* – Sree Rameswaram Temple tank, Kollam (44 miles away from the city). It is also identified with a lonely area near Palkulankara, in Thiruvananthapuram.
8. *Kanva Teertham* – Chetti Tank in Chettikulangara, Thiruvananthapuram.
9. *Saptarshi Teertham* – Seven tanks including the present-day Sree Rishimangalam Temple tank collectively termed thus (Thiruvananthapuram.)
10. *Brahmakundam* – Varkala (Kollam District)
11. *Ankavata Teertham*
12. *Jatakundam* or *Dakshina Ganga* – New Sree Sreekantheswaram Siva Temple tank.

Names of the *Teerthas* vary in various texts and this is noticed in the numbers listed. That may explain the absence of another important *Teertham* which has not found a place in the *Samuchayam*. That is the *Shankhu Teertham* which exists on the Shankhumughom Beach near the stone *Mandapam* wherein the Deities are placed in connection with the *Arat*. A special feature of this water source is that despite its close proximity to the sea and salt water, here the water is not at all saltish.

Another important *Teertham* which stands omitted is the *Sreepada Teertham* of antiquity held to have its source from under the sacred feet of the *Anantasayana Moorthy*. It is situated in the Sreepadam Palace compound close to the northern entrance of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

Though the above mentioned last two *Teerthas* have no place in this context they have been mentioned here in passing due to their significance.



A chapter-wise dissertation of the *Samuchayam* is being avoided despite its worthiness for fear of making this chapter too voluminous. Certain aspects alone are now incorporated for assimilation. Chapter twenty deals with the antiquity of two legends reflected in the *Samuchayam*. The tale of the *Jambookam* which attained salvation due to its devotion is presented. The second legend substantiates the existence of the massive reclining figure of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The author propounds the view that the terms *Puram* and *Kshetram* are identical in meaning. Here another meaning of *Kshetram* which denotes 'body' is adopted to lend support to the narration which states that the physical form of the Lord was spread across this entire city with the head resting at Thiruvallom and the feet not touching Thrippadapuram (Thrippappoor), as is the popularly accepted version, but extending far beyond to Mahanadi identified with the Attingal river, Attingal which was the permanent residence of the Attingal Ranies who were the ladies of the ruling Travancore dynasty.

The second legend is of immense importance as it disproves the theories about the consecration of the Temple by Vilvamangalam II or III who both have time demarcations after the 10th century. The one explanation if it is Vilvamangalam I, who did the consecration — and he lived before the *Samuchayam* is that he would have reconsecrated an already existing Divinity which had somehow during the travails of time fallen into neglect. Hence this work also contributes to underwriting the age of this Temple.

The *Samuchayam* throws light on many rites and ceremonies that were conducted in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. In *Pujotsava-Varnana* this subject is dealt with, with special reference to *Trikalabeliseva*. One whole chapter, the 24th, devotes itself to extolling the merits of this *Beliseva*, *Puja*, the *Utsavam* or festival including the flag hoisting marking its commencement. A historically interesting mention is that of the Koopaka, Pandya and Chola crowned heads as well as many other devotee kings attending the festival (though wars had occurred off and on in the power-tangle of the South). It is in this manuscript that the earliest available documented evidence of the *Arat* procession of Sree Padmanabha Swamy appears.

The line,

“यात्राभिर्ग्रामवीथीषु पुण्यैरवभृतैरपि”

which translates as “*procession through the villages and streets and final ritualistic sacred immersion*”, stands in support of the same.

Other lines wherein the festival is referred to are also present. They declare that Sree Padmanabha Swamy goes on procession carried in a palanquin *Vahanam*.



“ये चोत्सवेषु सरसीरुहनाभसेवां  
 कुर्वन्ति निर्वृतधियोऽनुसरन्त एनम् ।  
 कान्तं कुशेशयशयं शिविकाधिरूढं  
 निष्क्रम्य यान्तमवलोकितसर्वलोकम् ॥”

*“Sree Padmanabha, the entrancing One, the possessor of lotus-like palms who supervises and protects all humanity comes out of the sanctum sanctorum seated in a palanquin. The devotees, minds full of bliss, follow the Utsavam procession and thus pay homage to Him”.*

The glories of this great Temple have been repeatedly sung but special mention is made with regard to the inclusion of Syanandoorapura in the list of the most important Vaishnava centres such as Kashi, Ayodhya, Maya, Mathura, Kanchi and Ujjayini. Substituting Kashi for Syanandoor, the *Samuchayam* speaks of seven *Muktisthalas* or places of salvation. Vishnu whose original abode was Kashi gave away that city to Siva in the far off past and thereafter He began to permanently reside in Syanandoor on the coast of the southern ocean.

Some aspects of the social set-up too can be gathered from this manuscript. It mentions the gift of Sudra girls to temples in general as *Devadasies* and to Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in particular. There is no record showing when this system fell into disuse but it ceased to be a very long time back, possibly in the medieval era.<sup>11</sup> The author also provides salient points to prove the prevalence of the patrilineal system. History backs this as the matrilineal system came into existence only in the 13th century with Sangramadheera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara.

The geographical limits of those bygone days are defined in this work. Most of the areas mentioned exist even now and hence they lend themselves to easy identification. Though the extent was vast, it formed a compact territorial unit with separate cultural, linguistic and racial character. The cultural eminence of the royal court is clearly mentioned in the colophon as well. It forms the earliest documentary reference to the culture of the court of Travancore which kept its tradition alive, acquiring universal fame and admiration in the later centuries.

While dealing with the name gained by the regal court, the *Samuchayam* records in much greater detail the magnitude of the fame this Royal Temple claimed as its own, in education and scholarship as well as in protection and preservation of the holy scriptures. The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was

11. *Regent Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi, by Act of State abolished the Devadasi system during her period of rulership as it was then prevailing in parts of South Travancore.*

*But, much before then, it had faded out of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple*  
 CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhanta eGangotri Gyaan Kosha



able to foster this acclaimed activity till the recent years when sweeping political changes drew down the shutters on what had become an institution under its lofty banner. The city had developed as a centre not only for men of great learning, formal education and comprehensive religious instruction but also for the various systems of expertise like medical sciences, martial arts, music and literature. Even the most un-educated persons could seek and obtain learning here. The Temple would also feed and house them as well. Over and above all this, the *Puranas* would be daily read as part of *Danam* or gift not only in the Temple premises but near the gateways, on the banks of the *Padma Teertham* and in the houses of the Brahmins residing within the Fort complex. The *Samuchayam* stresses that with such daily recitals and periodic meets of eminent scholars, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple came to be acknowledged as the acclaimed seat of learning all over the sub-continent. It is gratifying to note that even today the *Maha Puranas* continue to be read every day here along with the chanting of the *Vedas* and other sacred texts.

This work goes on to extol the other *Danas* made by the Temple which included land, cows, free training in music and temple arts and free food distribution of awesome proportions which continued till recently. These gifts were made possible in the bygone ages as the monies and material required to defray the expenses of such activities were made available as *Danas* to the Temple by the Kings of Venad. This became an ongoing tradition.

Thus this magnificent work is a beacon light on the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple embracing the whole ambit of aspects of every nature that were seen in the land of Sree Padmanabha Swamy at that period of time.

The *Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam* concludes with beautiful words of praise to Sree Padmanabha touching upon His different incarnations.

## Sree Ramanujacharya

The 11th century saw the rise of Sree Ramanuja, a great philosopher-saint of *Vishistadvitham*. In an English biography of this sage, mention is made of his pilgrimage to Thiruvananthapuram to worship Sree Padmanabha Swamy. He had moved on to this city from Sreerangam where he had introduced certain changes in the mode of worship. He attempted to repeat them in this Temple too but was not successful as deviation from the age-old existing procedure was not acceptable. The present *Jeer Sri Srivansatakopa Sri Narayana Mahadesikan* who is the 45th pontiff of the *Ahobali Matt* in Andhra Pradesh, has additional significant input to offer. He tells of the dream Sree Ramanuja had while in Thiruvananthapuram in which Sree Padmanabha Swamy Himself appeared before the sage to convey to him that change was not favoured by Him and that the prevalent system of Namboodiri worship was what pleased Him. When the *Acharya* awoke the next morning, to his amazement he found himself Thirukkurumkudi with its famed Sree Maha Vishnu Temple which



finds a place among the 108 *Alvar Thiruppathies*. (This place is just beyond Aruwaymozhi, the old Travancore boundary and far away from Thiruvananthapuram). However, perhaps as a mark of honour to this illustrious sage, on the top column of at least three pillars positioned at different places within the *Nalambalam*, a sage is depicted in sitting portion, legs crossed and holding in his hand the special staff with flag attached to it. He is generally deemed to be Sree Ramanuja on two of this pillars and as Nammalvar on one pillar though there is a sharp differences in opinion about then identity.

## Ramacharitham

This work holds a place of its own as the first *Kavya Grandham* in Malayalam literature.

Couched in ancient Malayalam coloured with Tamil, it dates to the 12th century AD and was authored by Cheeraman (ചീരമാൻ) who is believed to have been a prince.

“മാരിവന്തതൊരു മാമലയെടുത്തു തടയും  
 മായനേ,യരചനായ് നിചിചരാതിപതിയെ  
 പോരിൽ നീ മുന്നം മുടിത്തമയെടുത്തു പുകഴ്വാൻ  
 പോകിപോകചയന! കവിയെന്നക്കരുൾ ചെച്ചേ”

“(Oh Padmanabha) Lord of Maya who stalled the rains by holding aloft the mountain (Govardhana) and who in the form of King (Rama) earned fame by slaying the king of the demons (Ravana) in war and who reclines on Ananta, pray bless me with the ability to compose poetry”.

From this and similar references which abound in the written pages we are able to safely conclude that Sree Padmanabha and His shrine had captured the perception of literary personalities in and outside Kerala. As we proceed we see that this golden chain of poets has gained in lustre and length and continues thus to this date.

## Anantapuravarnanam

This book originating from the pen of an unknown writer of late 12th or early 13th century is a milestone in the literary evolution of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in the language of the land. An early *Manipravalam* work which necessarily utilises a Malayalam heavily coloured with Sanskrit, it is a descriptive work on *Anantapuram* in *Champu* style wherein prose and poetry intermingle.

Stanzas 42 to 46 and 146 to 159 are of special interest in this context.

The title is of significance underscoring the possibility that Anantapuram was the predecessor to the current name. It is likely that it succeeded Aanandapuram.<sup>12</sup> In these and other names of varying vintage bestowed on

<sup>12</sup> Refer Page 1, line 5 of the text.



this city, the concept of *Aanandam* as bliss is apparent. This is not surprising since this blessed land basked in the reflected glory of the seat of bliss – the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

The relevant lines read as follows:

“അനന്തപുരമെന്തിതഥം  
ആനന്ദം കവിയായിതു,  
സ്തോത്രാമൃതരസം കൊണ്ടെൻ  
ശ്രോത്രപാത്രം നിറെപ്പിതു”

*“Bliss fills me by the very mention of the term Anantapuram and overflows as this poetic composition from my heart. My ears delight in absorbing the nectar-sweet hymns of praise (of the Lord of Anantapuram, Sree Padmanabha)”.*

This work exhibits strong similarity with the *Syanandoora Purana Samuchayam* in style. The author declares that due to the great expanse of Sree Padmanabha Swamy’s reclining form covering vast distances and reaching the western seas it is indeed an impossible feat to try to circumambulate it. (Possibly an inner meaning exists – the might of God is so far-flung that it is beyond normal comprehension)

*Anantapura-varnanam* opens with the following lines:

“പത്തു യോജന നീളത്തിൽ, പത്തു ദിക്കും നിറെഞ്ഞതു  
തിരുമേനി വലം വയ്പാനരുതെന്തു മയാ ശ്രുതം”

*“It is indeed impossible for me to attempt going round this form which extends in length to ten yojanas (eighty miles) and fills all the ten directions.”<sup>13</sup>*

This work is almost like a tourist guide of the Temple in portions dealing with it. Detailed descriptions are available about the well-laid pathways leading to the Temple and to the different areas of this magnificent construction starting with the Eastern *Gopuram* and entrance. This information cannot but be emphasised as it is commonly accepted that the foundation for this *Gopuram* was laid in the 15th century by King Adithya Varma but that the actual work was taken up in the 18th century by Marthanda Varma the Great and fully finished by his illustrious successor Sree Karthika Thirunal Dharmaraja. The very fact that a work relating to a century long before this accepted time mentions the *Gopuram* is ample proof to establish that it was there long way back. Like many other parts it would have somehow got destroyed. The flag-mast supported by figures of turtles and elephants with the Garuda bird on top of the mast, the Sree Sastha Temple, the Agrashala Ganapathy, Sree Krishna Temple, the front *Mandapam* and other *Mandapas* as well as the surrounding areas, Sree Vyasa’s shrine, the gold plated roof of the sanctum rising up in all majesty and the three

13. Ten directions – North, South, East, West, North-East, South-East, North-West, South-West, Above and Below (ie. Heaven and Earth).



doors to the sanctum, the *Belikkal* have all featured at considerable length providing them an impressive claim to the distant past. Significantly there is no mention of Sree Narasimha Moorthy.

Slokas 151-159 deal specifically with the description of the main Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.<sup>14</sup>

### Vasumathee Kalyanam

This is a drama in Sanskrit dating back to the late 12th century or early 13th century. The author's identity is unknown.

This work was written to be presented in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. There is mention about the *Painkuni* festival. This is yet another proof of its existence prior to the time of Marthanda Varma, the Great. (There is an erroneous belief that the above-mentioned festival was started by this King.)<sup>15</sup>

### Pradyumnabhyudayam

This Sanskrit drama in five acts has for its author none other than the famous Emperor of Malayala Nadu – Ravi Varma Kulasekhara, who goes down in history bathed in lustre as a multifaceted genius. He is equally well known as 'Sangramadheera' – fearless at war and master of the sixty four arts, his expertise stretching to embrace a vast canvas of activities like administration and literature as well. Though the capital of his farflung empire was Kollam, this Emperor's emotional involvement with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple goes on record. He directed his personal attention to the conduct of its affairs and poured forth his devotion to the Lord in more ways than one during the time he was in power from 1299 to 1313 AD.

*Pradyumnabhyudayam* was written by him specifically to be staged for the late spring *Utsavam* of the Swamy. Since the time is indicated it is concluded that the festival in question is the *Painkuni*, offering yet another documented evidence about its age.

The heroic deeds of the author himself stand reflected in this work. This drama was enacted at the instance of royal command especially to mark the *Yatrotsavam* or *Arat* procession of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

In the prelude the Emperor has described his '*Perumal*' in a most sublime turn of phrase as:

केरलदेशसुकृतपरिणति. . .

or as the total realization of the moral merit of Kerala country. Attention is drawn to the use of the term 'Kerala' which shows that the conception of a geographical area under that name was familiar in those days as well.

14. 1. Dr. Sooranat Kunjan Pillai, *Travancore University Oriental Series* 81.  
2. Dr. K. Retnamma, *Anantapura-Varnanam*.

15. Dr. A.G. Menon, '*History of Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple Till 1758*'

CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhanta eGangotri Gyaan Kosha



Elsewhere Sree Padmanabha is hailed as the dynastic Deity of the *Yadava* Kings:

“यादवनृपकुलदैवत”

The usage of the expression *Yadava* has led to misinterpretations. The *Yadava* clan mentioned here pertains to a sub division of Kshatriyas. It should not be confused with the community of shepherds who are also commonly known thus.

## Hamsa Sandesam

This is another of the numerous *Sandesa Kavyas* belonging to early 14th century and is written in Sanskrit. Poorna Saraswathi Namboodiri of the well-known *Kattumadassu Illom* is the author.

In this, the lovelorn damsel from Kancheepuram sends her message of love through the agency of a *Hamsam* or swan to her lover who is none other than Lord Krishna of Brindavan. Though the route does not really include the Kerala coast, she directs her messenger to visit the Chola country, the Kaveri basin, Sreerangam, Anantasayanam, Kalindi and so on. Anantasayanam is ofcourse Thiruvananthapuram.

“तेषां भूषामणिमनुपमं सेवितं योगिमुख्यैः  
प्राप्यानन्तं पुरमहिशयं ज्योतिरानम्य भक्त्या  
अन्विष्येस्तं जनमकरुणं मन्मनश्चोरमाराद्-  
देशे तस्मिन् स खलु रमते देवकीपुण्यराशिः ॥”

“After reaching Anantapuram wherein reside sages of great stature, and prostrating with devotion before that Lustre, Anantasayaae, you must seek out Him who without mercy has stolen my heart. He who is the blessed son of Devaki delights in staying there”.

## Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma

### 1. Unnuneeli Sandesam

This is another work of enduring popularity written in *Manipravalam* in the 14th century. While the author claims anonymity evaluators of this work hold the view that it is the great King ‘Sarvanganathan’ Adithya Varma who wrote it and who also appears in the role of the messenger of blue-blood in the story.

The hero of this text was being spirited away from his lady love by an amorous Yakshi. In despair he chants the *Sree Narasimha Mantram* which was so powerful that it compelled the Yakshi to release him suddenly. He fell down losing consciousness as he descended. On coming to his senses he realised he



was lying in the open ground of a temple which was, as he found out later, none other than the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. It is concluded that the utterance of the *Mantram* must have been when he was passing over the acknowledgedly potent Sree Narasimha shrine inside this Temple complex. He regained consciousness only when he inhaled the fragrance of the jasmine flowers from the Temple gardens. The hero, to his joy, hears praises of Sree Padmanabha as *Yoga Moorthy*<sup>16</sup> being sung and realises where he has arrived.

“നമ്മയ്ക്കായ നീ നിഖിലജഗതാം പദ്മനാഭാ മുരാദേ  
ചിമ്മീടാതേ തിരുനയനെമന്റുദ്ഗതാ വന്ദിവാചഃ”

*The bards sing requesting Sree Padmanabha, the slayer of Mura, to (keep) open His eyes for the well-being of the world.*

This central figure is deemed to be the ruler of Vadakkumkoor by virtue of the fact that his messenger was none other than Sarvanganathan, Senior Thiruvadi of Thrippappoor (the King of Venad). The logical conclusion is that the hero had to be a person of standing himself. His lady love, Unnuneeli, resides in Kaduthuruthy beyond central Travancore. The route from Thiruvananthapuram to Vadakkumkoor with a special note on Kollam (the then capital ) and the various sights on the way are enchantingly dealt with.

Despite being subject of long drawn-out debates on various historical aspects, this *Sandesa Kavyam*, perhaps the earliest known one of its type in *Manipravalam*, dwells in great detail, particularly in stanzas 37 to 48, on this Temple and close-lying areas offering valuable insight into the conditions existing then. It also presents enough proof of the historical, spiritual and material importance of this flourishing seat of devotion, which had long ago acquired the status of the religious capital of the land. Gardens with *Thulasi*, *Pichi* (jasmine) and *Mulla* which were owned and used by this Temple<sup>17</sup> and the Temple tank with a riot of lotus blooms are recorded. Details of the *Sreekovil*, the red silk canopy on the platform of various *Mandapas*, the imposing *Belikkal* all appear in this work. An entry of great significance is the Sree Narasimha Swamy Temple on the south where it stands to this day. It seems to be one of the earlier references of this Deity that is mentioned in Malayalam literature.<sup>18</sup> The cradle of the Lord outside the *Sreekovil*, Thiru Ampati Krishna Swamy, Sree Veda Vyasa, Sree Vishvakshenan, Sree Rama-Lakshmana Sita-Hanuman, Sree Kshetrapalan, Sree Lakshmi and Bhoomi Devies inside the sanctum and Garuda are all included even then, covering the entire range of main Deities as of today. Thanks to this book they stand absolved of later identity. However, the Agrashala Ganapathy who had previously appeared is missed out here.

16. 'Unnuneeli Sandesam' – Stanza 8.

17. Site of the present Abhedananda Asramam.

18. *Brahmanda Puranam – Anantasayana Mahatmyam – Reference to Nruhari (Narasimham)*  
- Sanskrit work.



The *Kavyam* commences with a very fine description of this city. In the next verse it states that the hero's confusion about which city he was in was resolved when he lent an attentive ear to the prayers rising from the Temple. It was then clear that the Deity installed within was Vishnu in *Yogasayanam*. Another stanza deals with the groves of trees, yet another makes mention of the bowers where the flower *Chempaka* (Mycheeliya Chempaka) would have been cultivated. Spotlight is directed on the famed warrior-conqueror of Venad, 'Sangramadheera' Ravi Varma and his achievements. His regular worship at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple despite the problem of distance as well as his personal commitment and devotion are prominently entered.

It is in the *Poorva Bhagam* or former half that the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and related aspects are available in a significant manner. While stanzas 37 to 41 are on the Lord Himself, stanzas 42 to 48 write about the other Deities and features connected to the Temple.

A few representative lines are quoted below:<sup>19</sup>

“നാഭീപദ്മം നിഖിലഭൂവനം ഞാറുപെയ്താത്തയോനിം  
നാഗേശ്വരേണ ബത! മതുമതപ്പള്ളികൊള്ളും പിരാണേ  
നാഗാരാതിദ്ധാജനേ, നവരം മുമ്പിൽ നി കുന്ദിടേണ്ടു  
നാൽവേതത്തിൽ പരമപൊരുളാം നമ്മുടേ തമ്പിരാണേ”

The above words are addressed to the messenger by the hero.

*“You have necessarily to prostrate before our Lord, Sree Padmanabha who Himself being unborn has given birth to this entire universe, who takes rest with ease on the serpent-couch, who has Garuda as the emblem of the flag and who is the ultimate essence of all the four Vedas”.*

“.....  
.....  
പാരേശിന്നും തുയിൽ കുറവറപ്പൊകുവാൻ പള്ളികൊള്ളും  
കാരുണ്യാബ്ധേ തവ പദയുഗം പദ്മനാഭാ തൊഴിന്റേൻ”<sup>20</sup>

*“I salute you, O! ocean of compassion, Sree Padmanabha, slumbering in cosmic consciousness for dispelling the misery of the seven worlds”.*

Praise and veneration for the Deity are obvious in such selected stanzas. Certain qualifications seen elsewhere like “ഭോഗീന്ദ്രഭോഗേ” indicative of *Anantasayanam* and “ഭാഗ്യസീമൻ” as the outer limit of fortune, appear most evocative.

Even with the passage of time, this work continues to hold its own as the earliest documented, descriptive data on this Temple in Malayalam literature.

19. Stanza No. 37.

20. Stanza 39, last two lines.



## 2. Desavathara Charitham

This *Manipravalam kavyam* consists of eleven stanzas<sup>21</sup> that go into the formation of a devotional song composed in praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Syanandoorapuri. It is yet another of Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma's works necessarily dating back to the 14th century. A staunch Vaishnavite, this mighty warrior held the thought of the Perumal close to his heart.

“ക്ഷീരാംഭോനിധി ദേവദൈത്യനിവഹം കുടിക്കടഞ്ഞന്റുടൻ  
നേരേ താണ ധരാധരം ച മുതുകിൽത്താങ്ങിൻ കുർമ്മാകൃതിം  
പാരിൽപ്പൊങ്ങിനതെന്നനന്തപുരമുറ്റാനന്ദനിദ്രാവഹം  
നീരേരും ജലദാളിനീലവപുഷം ശ്രീപദ്മനാഭം ഭജേ”<sup>22</sup>

*“I adore Sree Padmanabha*

*Who possesses the colour of water-laden clouds,*

*Who, in order to support the Mandara mountain*

*Which sank beneath the waves while the Ocean of Milk was being churned*

*By the hordes of gods and demons,*

*Took the form of Tortoise*

*And supported it on the back and*

*Who later on arose in Anantapura as*

*Sree Padmanabha enjoying the bliss of cosmic slumber”.*

## Leelathilakam

Master-minded and written by a Namboodiri scholar of unknown identity, in the latter half of the 14th century, it is unique. It seems to be the first great work on grammar and rhetoric on *Manipravalam* literature. The treatise is in Sanskrit.

In the first *Shilpam*, which deals with the characteristics of *Manipravalam*, there is a verse which is an example of *Pattu* in Dravidian languages. It is in praise of 'Aanandan' (Vishnu, who is the representation of pure bliss) dwelling in Thiruvananthapuram. The second part of the verse is cited:

“ഒരു വരന്താ പരന്താമമേ നീ കനി-  
-ന്തൂരകചായി പിണിപ്പുവ നീന്താവണ്ണം  
ചിരതരം താഴ്പണിന്തേനയ്യോ താക്കെന്ന-  
-ത്തിരുവനന്താപുരം തങ്കുമാനന്തനേ”

*Oh! Lord Who reclines on Ananta, O! Bliss (Ananda) residing in Thiruvananthapuram, how long I have been worshipping at Your feet! Grant*

21. TAS Volume, Part II, 1930.

22. 1. Dr. A.G. Menon – ‘History of Sri Padmanabhasvami Temple Till 1758’.

2. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – Vol. II, P-86, Poona Oriental Series No. 94.



*me a boon by which I will be able to swim and cross the ocean of the world (Samsaram)".*

It is clear from these lines that in the Fourteen Hundreds the place name of Thiruvananthapuram was in use, already.

## Mayura Sandesam

There is conflict of opinion on the age of this *Kavyam* varying from late 14th, early 15th and going to early 16th century. It was written in Sanskrit by Udaya Varma, ruler of Manakkulam near Thrissur.<sup>23</sup>

This work contains a glorious description of Thiruvananthapuram and the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. In the days when the world had not shrunk and travel was not easy, the King is seen to have undertaken this journey, prompted not by the desire of conquest but by devotion. Stanzas 29 and 30 elaborate the *Belimaha* of this Temple described by him as *Manikya Sreebelimaha*.

The hero's presence in this city is explained thus:

1. "दैत्यारातिं दलितशतमन्यूपलोदारशोभं  
पश्यन्नेनं भुजगशयने कल्पितस्वापसौख्यम्"

*The lover though cursed by the celestials, was also given the blessing of spending the one month which was the duration of the curse, in this holy place. He descended in Syanandoora. On opening his eyes he viewed Sree Padmanabha, the foe of the demons possessing the iridescent hue of the blue cut-sapphire and who enjoys the comfort of slumber on Ananta who serves as the couch.*

2. "काले तस्मिन् बलिमहनिषेवार्थमाढौकमाना  
नानादिग्भ्यो मनुजनिवाहान् भ्रातरध्यक्षयेथाः ।"

*Brother you may observe people coming in large numbers from different places in order to attend the Sreebeli festival (of the Lord).*

## Achyutaraayaabhyudayam

This is a *Mahakavyam* (epic poem) in 12 Cantos in the backdrop of the IIIrd Vijayanagaram Dynasty which flourished in the Fifteen Hundreds. The author is Rajanatha Dindiman and the language used, Sanskrit.

Achyutaraayaa's, victorious southern expedition is dealt with. Salakaraja, the ruler of Vijayanagaram, is defeated and sues for peace which is readily

23. 1. Manuscripts Library, Trivandrum, Manuscript donated from Palace Library.  
2. K. K. Raja – *The Contributions of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature*.



granted. Thereafter Salakaraja proceeds to Anantasayanam to worship Achyuta reclining there.

There is a difference in opinion about the identity of the temple especially due to the mention of the Battle of Thamravarni and the King's journey to Rameswaram. As such, with the Thamravarni river flowing in south Tamil Nadu, another temple is projected as *Anantasayanam*. However other scholars like Dr. S. Krishna Swamy Iyengar and Dr. Venkitaramayya are firm in their conviction that *Anantasayanam* and Thiruvananthapuram are one and the same. They explain the inclusion of River Thamravarni by stating that the Kuzhithura river in Travancore was also known by the name Thamravarni.

## Chaitanya Charitamrutam

Though the Bengali biography of this great saint in verse form is more modern, it is set in the 15th century when Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu lived. The author, Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswamy, has compiled this work in many volumes.

In Madhyalila Volume I, stanza 15, it is recorded that Sree Chaitanya visited the Vishnu Temples of Anantadeva, Purushothama, Janardana, Padmanabha and Vasudeva.

In Volume IV, in stanzas 241 and 242, it is said that the Mahaprabhu copied the *Brahma Samhita* while at Thiruvattar and afterwards with great pleasure proceeded to a place known as 'Ananta Padmanabha', remained there for a couple of days or so and then moved on to Varkala (Janardana Temple). Thiruvananthapuram comes between Thiruvattar and Varkala.

Sree Chaitanya is said to have extolled Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple as one among the six *Narayana Sthalas* or places where Sree Narayana is ever present, in Bharatham. (Thiruvattar Sree Adi Kesava Temple too is included).

## Kottayam Kerala Varma

### 1. Valmiki Ramayanam Translation

In the 17th century, at the invitation of Regent Queen Umayamma Rani of Travancore, the valiant prince Kottayam Kerala Varma came to her aid in quelling the disturbances erupting in the land. He was a great scholar. Standing at the feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy he translated the first five *Kandas* of the *Valmiki Ramayanam* into Malayalam. As such it came to be known as *Kerala Varma Ramayanam*. The poet pays homage to Sree Padmanabha Swamy in the following lines.

“ശ്രീപതിയായിടുന്ന സ്വാമനുരേശൻ തന്റെ

ശ്രീപാദത്തിങ്കൽ നിന്നു ശ്രീപാദങ്ങളും കൃപി...”



*"Standing at the sacred feet of the Lord of the Goddess of Prosperity (Lakshmi Devi), who (the Lord) is the Master (King) of Syanandooram, I worship those sacred feet".*

## 2. Padmanabha Keerthanam

This is another composition of Kottayam Kerala Varma. It is devotional and in classical style and can be compared to a *Keerthanam* with twenty *Charanas* (ചരണങ്ങൾ). The language is Sanskrit.

“ध्यायेमानिशं श्रीपद्मनाभम्  
शेषभोगशयनं वरभूषण-  
भूषितावयवपौरुषवेषम्”

*We should meditate on Sree Padmanabha all time, who reclines on Ananta, different parts of whose body are adorned with unique ornaments and who presents a manly appearance.*

## Sree Padmanabha Literature in the Modern Age

Many are the works on Sree Padmanabha Swamy that took shape and form in increasing numbers with the advent of the modern age. It has been for the sake of convenience of historical analysis, given a starting point with Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, Maker of Modern Travancore, in the Seventeen Hundreds. With greater attention being focused on the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and change in vision due to Marthanda Varma's *Thrippati Danam*, an abundance of such literature blossomed. It included the writings of scholars and poets as well as of members of the Travancore Royal House, many of whom were accomplished experts of letters and language.

## Age of Marthanda Varma Sree Padmanabha Charitham

This work written by Krishna Sharma of Maharaja Marthanda Varma's court is an unpublished manuscript dating back to the Seventeen Hundreds and is in Sanskrit.<sup>24</sup> He was encouraged to embark on this work by Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma, himself a scholar of great merit.

This manuscript which progresses like a *Champu* (prose and poetry) in character is rich in details of the said Temple, its rituals and the city. It also contains praise for the King whom he describes as the 'നരപാലവീര' (brave among the kings) possessing 'പവിത്രകീർത്തി' (unsullied fame).

The lofty *Gopuram* embellished with many a female sculpture is mentioned but the poet has deemed it fit to bypass the whole variety of other forms.

24. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer – *Vijnana Deepika - Part - IV.*



A clear indication of the huge quantities of *Nivedyas* offered is obtained when the author declares that the amount of *Palppayasam* cooked daily in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple is sufficient to make an ocean of milk. He must have purposely used this turn of phrase as Sree Padmanabha Swamy is visualised as reclining on Ananta who floats on *Palaazhi*, which is the famous Ocean of Milk. Krishna Sharma describes the *Sreekovil* with the three doors, the sanctity of which annihilates the sins of the past, present and future lives. The *Siveli* procession accompanied by devotional songs is recorded. Miraculous appearance of milk and blood from the inner reaches of the Temple and its walls denoting favour or ire is included. The Temple is pictured as a busy pilgrim centre where holy men and pilgrims would recite prayers at the *Vyasa Mandapam* (where *Puranas* are read). History too is touched upon.

This work also deals with the story of the origin of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. It can only be accepted as a version of the later origin due to the glaring contradiction of time frames. The story follows the one given in *Anantasayana Kshetra Mahatmyam* with the Tulu Brahmin seer Divakara as the pivotal figure. Killiyar, Valiashala Temple and Anantankatu are touched upon. Finally, the scene of the Sage leading the Kulasekhara King to the spot consecrated by Sree Padmanabha Swamy is described.

### Bhrunga Sandesam or Bhramara Sandesam

This 18th century work in Sanskrit is authored by Vasudevan alias Vasu Bhattari.

In the narration, the lover who is whisked away by an passionate Yakshi promptly abandons him on seeing her husband approaching. He falls down into the city of Syanandoora. Through the agency of a *Bhrungam* (bee) he sends his message of love to his beloved residing in Swetadurga (today's Kottakkal). In it he glorifies the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. He exclaims:

“राज्यं दृष्ट्या कलय रविवर्मावनीन्द्रस्य संपत्-  
 प्राज्यं वाज्यन्तरितविशिखोदग्रमग्रे समग्रम् ।  
 चित्रोत्कीर्णत्रिदशनिवहस्थूलनीलोपलौघै-  
 र्धाम्नातुल्यं त्रिभुवनपतेर्धाम येन प्रतेने ॥”<sup>25</sup>

“Observe fully the domain of King Ravi Varma which abounds in prosperity and where the royal paths are obscured due to the presence of the cavalry. It is indeed this King who constructed the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple containing a number of idols sculpted out of black granite, the radiance of which makes the Temple unparalleled”.



## Bala Marthanda Vijayam

Devaraja Kavi, who was in prominence from 1729 to 1758 AD, was a poet during the reign of Marthanda Varma. He wrote this drama in five acts in Sanskrit. It is a valuable document of those critical times and provides much insight into the re-construction work in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the existing system of administration. All other issues like the wars of consolidation and conquest or rule of the King finally become linked with the Temple and its Deity *Tunga Phanindra Sayee* 'तुंगफणीन्द्रशायी'.

In the opening section the poet pays homage to the different Deities and in three full verses waxes eloquent on the unbounded powers of Sree Padmanabha. The story of Vilvamangalam is also introduced.

## Padmanabhodayam

This work is in one hundred and forty two stanzas divided into four parts written in Sanskrit by a Tamil Brahmin by name Sanku.<sup>26</sup> It is in unpublished form and is seen dealing exclusively with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and its origin connecting it with Sage Divakara.

The poet eulogises his patron, Marthanda Varma, in a couple of stanzas before beginning the actual story. His veneration is obvious in this verse.

“क्षेमाय तस्यैव च तत्कुलस्य  
विहाय दुग्धाम्बुनिधिं रमेशः ।  
शेतेऽत्र शेपे हि तदीयवृत्तं  
संगृह्य किञ्चिद्रचयामि पद्यैः ॥”

*For the well being of the King and his family, Sree Padmanabha (Ramesa) left the Ocean of Milk and came to recline on Ananta, here in this Temple. I am narrating in a few verses, the story of the Lord”.*

## Sitaraghavam

This is a Sanskrit drama in seven acts. It is generally believed that its author was one Ramapanivada while a few confer on him the identity of the famous humorist poet Kunjan Nambiar.

This drama has an importance of its own as it was written with the intention of enacting it for the *Murajapam* and *Lakshadeepam* festival instituted by Marthanda Varma himself. *Sitaraghavam* was presented during the festival of 931 ME/1756 AD, the last to be conducted by this great King. The date is mentioned at the outset.

26. Ullloor S. Parameswara Iyer – ‘Kerala Sahitya Charitram’ Vol. III.



This drama also stresses the great impetus received in the field of literature and the assembly of scholars gathering here for discussions and display of their merit.

“स्यानन्दूराभिधाने महितमहिमनि क्षीरवारान्निधाने  
तल्पे सर्पेशरूपे रुचिमति पतगाधीशयानः शयानः ।  
आधाता वाञ्छितानामवनिवलभिदां वञ्चिभूपालनाम्ना-  
मानायज्ञापकेन स्पुटमिह विलसत्यात्मना पद्मनाभः ॥”

*“In the Ocean of Milk by name Syanandoora of esteemed majesty, Sree Padmanabha whose car is the King of birds, Garuda, who bestows all desires on the Vanchi Kings with the fame of Indra, reclining on the brilliantly luminous couch of Adi Sesha shines in His divine form, clearly bringing to our minds the relevant passages of the Vedas.”*

### Thullal Kathas of Kunjan Nambiar

Kunjan Nambiar, the acclaimed genius of Malayalam poetry, whose popularity transcended the passage of years to continue into the living present, hailed from Kalakkattu (കലക്കൽ) in North Kerala. He was a frequent and favoured visitor to Maharaja Marthanda Varma's court where he used to stay for considerable lengths of time as a recipient of the King's generosity, hospitality and encouragement. He was responsible for evolving a particular art form known as *Thullal*, which combined masterly handling of language, generously interspersed with satire and presented in a singsong style with minimum hand movements. However, in many of his compositions he has lauded Sree Padmanabha Swamy in terms of pure *Bhakti*. *Hanumadubhavam*, *Karinee Swayamvaram*, *Sabhapravesham* etc. are in illustrations to the point. A few lines from the second work are being incorporated here.

“അല്പേതര പ്രഭാവത്തോടു ഭോഗീന്ദ്ര-  
-തല്പേ മുദാ പള്ളികൊണ്ടരുളീടുന്ന  
ശ്രീമദ് തിരുവനന്താലയാധിശ്വരാ  
ശ്രീപദ്മനാഭാ! നമസ്തേ നമോസ്തുതേ.”

*Oh! Sree Padmanabha, Sovereign of blessed Anantapuri where You daily slumber with rare dignity on a serpent, I prostrate again and again before You.*

### Vanchippattu and Ramapurathu Warriar

Ramapurathu Warriar won unfading fame in the realm of boat song literature, even now so dear to the Malayalee heart. Some stanzas from his reputed work *Kuchelavaritham Vanchippattu* appear thus.



“കുറ്റമറ്റ തിരുക്കാപ്പുമകത്തെ മുറ്റവും തിരു-  
 മുറ്റത്തുള്ള മണ്ഡപവുമമ്പലം നാലും  
 ചുറ്റിനകത്തും പുറത്തും ബലിശിലകളും വെണ്മ-  
 പെറ്റവേദികയും പൊന്നിന് കൊടിമരവും  
 അറ്റത്തികലന്തരീക്ഷം പൊക്കിക്കളഞ്ഞാത്തപീഠം  
 പറ്റിയൊരു പക്ഷിരാജപരിഷ്കാരവും  
 ഇന്ദ്രനീലശിലയാ നിർമ്മിതമാം ശീവേലിപ്പന്തൽ  
 ഇന്ദ്രിയങ്ങൾക്കാനന്ദമാമകണങ്ങളും  
 ചന്ദ്രശാലാശതങ്ങളും ചാരുതരഹർമ്യങ്ങളും  
 ചന്ദ്രികാ ചർച്ചിതങ്ങളാ പ്രസാദങ്ങളും  
 ഗോപുരംനാലും വളർന്ന വാമനന്റെ വട്ടമേറും  
 നൂപുരംപോലെ വിളങ്ങും പൊൻപ്രാകാരവും  
 ദീപിക്കുന്നു ദിവ്യരത്നമയം, ചൊല്ലപ്പെട്ടതെല്ലാം  
 പാപിദ്യക്കുകൾക്കേ കല്പം മരവുമാവു.”

*The immaculate portal of the Sreekovil, the courtyard within, the Mandapam in the sacred front yard, the temples numbering four, the Beli stones inside and outside the Chuttu (enclosure), the floor paved with white stones, the flagmast of gold with Garuda the innovative King of birds aptly positioned at its extreme end as though raising the firmament upwards, the roofed Sivelippura made of granite of sapphire hue, the courtyards which are a feast to the senses, the four Gopuras and the rambling Temple (or Fort) walls possessing the glow of gold like the circular anklet of Vamanan who had grown to gigantic proportions, they radiate the brilliance of divine gems. Only the eyes of the sinful would view all these as mere stone and wood.*

### The Mathilakam Katha/Mathilakam Pattu

This is a delightful production full of local flavour and is classified as a ballad in *Vilpattu* style popular in South Travancore and sung by Pulavars. From the fact that certain events like the construction of the *Sivelippura* and many details linked with the reconstruction of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple feature, it is assuredly logical to establish its age as the 18th century. Deviating from the high flown Sanskrit or Sanskritised Malayalam, the language used here is a basic simple mixture of Malayalam and Tamil. The author retains anonymity.<sup>27</sup>

The legend of the origin of the Temple and its construction as ordered by the ruler of Travancore are dwelt upon at length. The *Sivelippura* to protect the God from rain, progress of the stone work, confrontation with the *Bhootam* and his appeasement twice, a place provided for him in the southern courtyard<sup>28</sup>

27. *Kanjiramkulam, Thekkanpattu Series.*

28. *That spot is still in use for giving Beli (food) to the Bhootam.*



of the Temple, the name of the chief mason Anantha Padmanabha Moothashari, varied constructions in the Temple, *Nivedyas*, various *Pujas* and the Nambi's dream in which he was ordered to bring fire from the Pulaya woman's hut to light the lamp inside the *Sreekovil*, are all included.

The term *Mathilakam* which means 'inside the walls' is very much in vogue as another name commonly used for the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

“ചാണക്കല്ലു അടിപ്പതു പാരായ്

ചീളക്കല്ലുമടിപ്പതു പാരായ്”

Such lines and more go to describe the masonry work of the Temple in an extensive manner. This may be due to the fact that the replacement of wood with granite came in a really big way during this period.

### Under the banner of Dharmaraja

Among the numerous literary expositions having their birth in Dharmaraja's court a selective study is attempted herewith. These works do not elaborate on the vast *Kathakali* plays Dharmaraja was responsible for and which led to the establishment of the *Kapplingadu Thekkan* or Southern School of *Kathakali* which continues to be the accepted style of *Kathakali* presented at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. They were all dedicated to the *Perumal* by the King.

### Vasulakshmee Kalyanam

Sadasiva Dikshithar, who lived in the 18th century, wrote this drama in Sanskrit for presentation during the *Painkuni Utsavam*. Art forms were projected far more for this festival and the same trend seems to be followed by authors and poets too who wrote with this festival in view and not the *Alpashi Utsavam*, as is seen from the following line.

“भगवतः श्री पद्मनाभस्य वसन्तोत्सवे परिमिलिता  
एव सामाजिकाः...”

This means the assembly of spectators who gathered during the spring (*Painkuni*) festival of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

### Padmanabha Vijayam

Yet another work of this age is a long poem in eight cantos in Sanskrit by Subramonya who was a court poet. It contains laudatory verses about Sree Padmanabha, the greatness of the Temple and the exploits of the King (Dharmaraja) himself.<sup>29</sup>

29. 1. *Thiruvananthapuram Palace Library Collection No. 1836.*

2. *'Kerala Sahitya Charitram' III.*

3. *K.K. Raja - 'Contributions of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature'.*



## Alankarabhushanam

Another literary creation of this period, this contains praises of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and His *Dasa*, Dharmaraja, and is in Sanskrit. One Kalyana Subramonya is the author.

## Chataka Sandesam

This *Kavyam* was composed in the period before Tippu Sultan's futile venture to capture Travancore, in the reign of the famous Dharmaraja. Much of the history of the immediate past and of that time is presented here.

While the author remains unknown, the clue about the possible identity rests solely on the mention of Thirumandhamkunnu Temple in Angadippuram in Malappuram. He could be a Namboodiri from that area. The language is Sanskrit.

“पूर्व तावत् प्रथितयशसां मुक्तिभाजां मुरारिः  
प्रादुर्भूतः किल परमहंसोत्तमानां हितार्थ ।  
दत्त्वा तेभ्यःस्वयमथ निजं धाम दिव्यं सदारो  
यत्रैवासावशरण इव प्रत्यहं वर्तते च ॥”

In this stanza he extols the sanctity of the city in superlative terms. He states that *long ago after having gifted away His celestial abode Vaikuntham to His exalted devotees, Vishnu, having no home of His own, came along with Sree or Lakshmi (another meaning for the term prosperity) to the earth and made Syanandoora His permanent residence.*

This work was composed in late 18th century.

## Bala Rama Bharatham

This unique work is a treatise on Bharatha Muni's *Natya Sastram* written in the 18th century by no less a personage than Maharaja Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma Dharmaraja. An accomplished linguist, he has written this work in Sanskrit. It is acclaimed even now as a masterpiece. Apart from its technical brilliance, the flow of language invites admiration. There is a beautiful description of Thiruvananthapuram. Three enchanting verses about Sree Padmanabha Swamy merit mention out of which two are cited below:

“श्रीमद्भानुसहस्रकोटिसदृशः पीताम्बरालंकृत-  
श्चञ्चत्कुण्डलशोभिगण्डयुगलः श्रीवत्सवक्षा हरिः ।  
लक्ष्मीभूमिकटाक्षवीक्षणलसच्छृंगारभावोज्ज्वलः  
पायात् पन्नगराजभोगशयनः श्रीपद्मनाभः सदा ॥”

“*May Sree Padmanabha always protect (us)*  
*Who is resplendent like crores of brilliant suns,*



*Who is attired with (the) yellow vestment,*

*Who has (both) His cheeks made luminous with the reflection of swaying ear-rings,*

*Who has His chest adorned with the Sreevatsam,<sup>30</sup>*

*Who nullifies all the sorrows of His devotees,*

*Who appears enchanting due to the emotion of love born of beautiful side-glances of Devies Lakshmi and Bhoomi,*

*Who reposes on the body of the serpent-king."*

“योगीन्द्रभक्तिपरिशोधनकारणेन

पूजान्तरे नटनमातनुतातिहृष्टः ।

यो बालवेषमुपगम्य स पद्मनाभो

नृत्तप्रियो जयतु तुंगफणीन्द्रशायी ॥”

“Hail! to that Sree Padmanabha

*Who rests on the couch of the serpent-lord*

*Who, taking pleasure in dancing, assumed the form of a boy and danced with exuberant thrill in the midst of worship so as to verify the depth of the Sage's devotion”.*

## Prince Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma—Submissions in Letters

Nephew of the illustrious Dharmaraja and next in line to the Throne, Rama Varma expired at a young age during his uncle's lifetime itself. Like many of the family before him, he too was a scholar and writer of high repute. He made thirteen contributions to literature in Sanskrit and Malayalam, which include four *Attakkathas* (*Kathakali* works), two dramas, three *Prabandhams* and poems. Wherever possible he has eulogised Sree Padmanabha Swamy. He lived from 931 to 969 ME (1756 to 1784 AD).

### 1. Sree Padmanabha Keerthanam

This work is specifically in praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and is in verse form consisting of twenty stanzas in Malayalam.<sup>31</sup> It is believed that this was composed when the prince was a student as, in comparative assessment, it does not seem to possess his usual expertise.

This *Stotram* presents a description of the Lord from the sacred feet to the crown of the head.

30. Mark on Vishnu's chest due to the kick of Sage Bhrugu because of imagined insult. The mark remained permanent as a symbol of the Lord's loving acceptance of the acts of His true devotees, even in anger.

31. K.K. Raja – *Contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature*.



“അതുകൂലപജമകൂപകൂവിചിടാമദം  
പതിച്ചൊഴിച്ചൊളിച്ചു കുമ്പിടുന്ന പൊല്പദങ്ങളും”

*“The pride of the tortoise about its own unique curved form stands eliminated on seeing the beautiful (arched) feet of Sree Padmanabha and it stands in a posture of humility before them (feet)”.*

“അനന്തകാന്തിരമ്യമാമനന്തമന്ദിരം നിറ-  
നനന്തസർവ്വപത്മപശിപ്തപലക്ഷിതാംഗ പാഹി മാം”

*“God save me, whose divine form is perceived reposing with all grace on the bed-rest of Ananta in the Temple of Ananta's city, and whose beauty is endless”.*

## 2. Poothana-moksham (Attakkatha)

“पद्मनाभ परमपुरुष पाहि मां विभो  
छद्मरहित भक्तमहित शुद्धगुणनिधे ।”

*Padmanabha Supreme Entity, Perumal (God) worshipped by devotees, Lord, devoid of all blemishes, oh repository of every pure and good quality, pray protect me.*

## 3. Sringarasudhakara Bhanam

This romantic Sanskrit drama is a mono act. The *Chaitra Mahotsavam* (*Painkuni* festival) is described as well:

“स्यानन्दूरपुरवरकृतसान्निध्यस्य भगवतः  
श्रीपद्मनाभस्य चैत्रमहोत्सवकोलाहलावलोकन-  
कुतूहलतया निखिलहरिन्मण्डलसमाहिण्डितैः  
सकलकलापण्डितैः सामाजिकैः.....”

*“Before the assembly of experts who have gathered from all quarters of the world, in order to observe and participate in the Chaitra Utsavam of Sree Padmanabha, who has by His presence graced the great city of Syanandooram.....”.*

It must be kept in mind that while *Alpashi* was conducted by the Temple for the Temple, *Painkuni* was conducted by the Throne for the Temple. That could explain why greater emphasis and activity in art and literature were obviously on view during the latter *Utsavam*.

For want of space the other compositions of this royal author are excluded.



## Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma – Triumph of Devotion

In unbound extravaganza of emotional overflow Maharaja Swathi Thirunal (of early 19th century) poured forth his adoration, longing, trauma and depthless devotion at the lotus feet of his royal Deity. He lived, breathed and moved in the *Perumal* in the literal sense of the term. In all the forty five books in many languages authored by him, leaving aside those few dealing with technicalities, the inspiration, theme and hero was Sree Padmanabha Swamy. As such, a whole volume of considerable proportions would be required to do some justice to this topic. Since the subject matter allows only a portion of a chapter due to abundance of material and scarcity of space, only a very incomplete and sketchy presentation appears possible. It is also a difficult task to decide on which lines to select from the masses of literature of breath-taking beauty that cradled his heart in love.

While the Maharaja has written about other Deities, the maximum involvement is with the Lord of his heart — his Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Using the medium of the pen which yielded to his touch, he channelised his acclaimed scholarly genius to extol the greatness and majesty of Sree Padmanabha through concert and dance-music, narrations, verses and so on. Sanskrit, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindustani, Vraj Bhasha (of the Gopas of Lord Krishna), Tamil etc were used as the medium of expression. While it was customary to add the name of the author in the work as is seen in the compositions of Thyagaraja, Purandaradasa etc, Sree Swathi Thirunal has never inserted his name. With the exception of a handful, all his compositions carry the *Mudra* or insignia – ‘*Padmanabha*’.

### 1. Sanskrit Compositions

An example of a classical work from countless numbers, set in *Raga Mukhari* – *Pahi Sada Padmanabha* is cited below, which is rich in devotion.

1. पाहि सदा पद्मनाभ पंकजाक्ष!  
देहि कुशलमनिशं दीनजनवत्सल! (पाहि)
2. करुणाकर भवदालयगमनविधौ बत मामक-  
चरणमिह सकुतुकं कुरु जगदधीश!
3. मुरमथन तव चारुमूर्तिदर्शने नयनं  
परमुत्सुकमयि परमानन्दरूप रचय (पाहि)
4. करमपि च तव रमेश परिपूजनविषये निशं  
निरतमिह विभो कलय नीरदाभकान्ते!
5. चरणकमलमिलितसुरभितुलसीदलतत्-  
परतरां च नासिकां विरचय सुरेश! (पाहि)



6. सरसतरकथापीयूषश्रवणे मम कर्णयुगं  
उरुसमोदमपि वितनु परमपुरुष!
7. सरसीरुहभव वासव परमविनुत चरित!  
सरिदधिपशयन! मे विहर हृदये देव! (पाहि)
1. *Protect me always, oh! Padmanabha (of lotus eyes)*  
*Grant me weal, oh! friend of the forlorn.*
2. *Merciful Lord, may my feet*  
*Be ever inclined to seek Thy shrine.*
3. *May my eyes ever delight*  
*To see Thy form full of bliss*
4. *May my hands devote themselves*  
*To worship Thee in ritual right.*
5. *May my nose have the pleasure (joy)*  
*To smell (inhale) the Thulasi at Thy feet.*
6. *May my ears always turn (tune)*  
*To listen (imbibe) to talks (words) on Thy deeds*
7. *Oh great Lord, praised by the gods,*  
*May Thy abode be my heart<sup>32</sup>*

Prominent Sanskrit works other than the musical compositions (wherein other languages are also used) in which the theme figures is Sree Padmanabha Swamy are *Bhakti Manjari* with over a thousand stanzas (in the style of *Narayaneeyam* but without any personal motive other than *Bhakti*), *Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabandham*, which is a voluminous and all comprehensive work on all related aspects of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the city it dominates, and *Sree Padmanabha Satakam*, which is generally rated as a masterpiece. The last two are daily read aloud in the Temple.

## II. Bhakti Manjari

Written in the declining years of Sree Swathi Thirunal's life, this is a weighty work of one thousand verses spread over ten chapters. It deals with a whole range of issues including stories of the God and the varied moods of divine devotion. As an example of the highly personalised *Bhakti* the King cherished

32. *English Translation by Dr. S. Venkatasubramonia Iyer 'Swathi Tirunal and His Music'.*  
*The words in brackets are this author's substitution.*



for Sree Padmanabha Swamy which took on the colouring of a sublime romance, this jewel of a stanza is presented.

“अंभोधिष्विह चातकावलिरिव प्रोत्फुल्लपद्माकरे  
हंसानां निकरो यथा हिमकरे यद्वच्चकोरव्रजः।  
माकन्देषु मधौ यथा पिकततिः पुष्पेषु भृंगो यथा  
स्वामिन् मामकमानसं विहरतां त्वय्येव नित्यं हरे! ॥”

“Like the pelican birds in their involvement with the piling rain-cloud formations, like the swans in the lotus pond, like the Chakora bird in its infatuation for the moon, like the sweet-throated Koyal birds in the mango trees during the spring season, like the bees in flowers, oh Lord! Hari! let my mind forever delight in You.” (All the simillies adopted have had enduring popularity in Indian romanticism).

### III. Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabandham

This *Prabandham* is deemed to be the most important historically and practically as it acts as a book of reference on many Temple related ritualistic aspects. It is beautifully executed and exhaustive in dealing with this Temple and is an invaluable record for and of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Its sanctity is such that it is daily read in the morning by a Brahmin who sits on the left *Vathil Madom* facing north.

*There are ten divisions which are as follows:*

1. *Balakreeda* (Frolics of the Lord as a child)
2. *Padmanabha Darsanam* (Vision of the Lord)
3. *Kesadipadanta Stuti* (Description of the Lord from head to foot)
4. *Kshetramahatmyam* (Glory of the Temple)
5. *Teertha Vaibhavam* (Sanctity of the holy water sources)
6. *Utsava Prasamsam* (In praise of the Festival)
7. *Mrgayavarnanam* (Description of the Hunt-Palli Vetta)
8. *Abhisheka Yatra* (Arat)
9. *Teerthaabhishekam* (Rituals)
10. *Lakshadeepotsavaslagham* (Extolling the *Lakshadeepam* festival)

In chapter III containing the glorification of the Lord in descriptive language, stanza 19 dwells on the sanctified feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy thus:



“कैलासेश्वरमौलिलालितवियत्स्रोतस्विनीसंभव-  
 स्थानं रक्तसरोजगर्भरुचिरं पादद्वयं शार्ङ्गिणः ।  
 सोऽद्राक्षीद्यमिनां वरोऽथ विलसद्वज्राब्जकुंभादिस-  
 द्रेखातल्लजशालि दुस्तरभवांभोधिप्लवं पावनम् ॥”

*The great Sage (Divakara Muni) saw revealed before him those feet which formed the source of the Akasha Ganga borne in the matted locks of Lord Siva, those sacred feet which possess the hue of the inner core of the red lotus feet, which are decorated with the symbols of the Vajra weapon, lotus and pot (of nectar) and which appear like the raft of salvation on the turbulent ocean of cyclic evolution and dissolution called 'universe'.*

#### IV. Sree Padmanabha Satakam

This is yet another emotional submission par excellence in ten chapters of ten stanzas each as is indicated by the title. Some rate it as the top-ranking work of the Maharaja. The earlier chapters go into the creation of the universe and stories of some of the incarnations. After elaborating on the *Sree Rama Avatharam* in the 7th chapter and *Sree Krishna Avatharam* in the 8th and 9th chapters, the 10th chapter converts as a song of praise to the glory and grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. The words appear to flow forth from the innermost core of the royal author's heart.

The following lines are taken from chapter One, stanza 3.

“तस्माच्छिन्धि मदीयमोहमखिलं संसारबन्धावहं  
 भक्तिं त्वत्पदयोर्दिश स्थिरतरां सर्वापदुन्मूलिनीम् ।  
 वाणीं त्वद्गुणवर्णने पटुतमां विद्वज्जनाह्लादिनीं  
 देहि त्वत्पदसेवकाय ननु मे कारुण्यवारान्निधे ॥”

*“Hail Wealth of mercy! Pray remove all the desires that stand responsible for bondage with the world. Grant me everlasting devotion at Thine feet which save one from all the dangers of the universe. Bestow on me, this humble being who is in service at Thy feet, that flow of words and expression which will enable me to gain expertise at lauding Thy sublimity and thus delighting the scholarly and the learned men.”*

#### V. Ghattiyam

These are short verses in praise in Sree Padmanabha Swamy in different languages like Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Hindi though surprisingly none seems to have been composed in Malayalam, the Maharaja's own tongue.



They total eighty three in number and each is different from every other. Infusion of royalty is apparent in the phraseology. They were written specifically to be recited in connection with the *Siveli* processions of the Lord whether they be the daily *Sivelies* or the ones that take place on special occasions including *Utsavam*. The Maharaja also ruled which *Ghattiyam* should be recited when and where each day. It continues to be faithfully followed to date.

1. "अस्ति ध्वस्तसुपर्वनाथनगरश्रीगर्वभारं परं  
दुग्धाम्भोनिधिकन्यकाऽनवरतक्रीडार्थसौधायितम् ।  
स्यानन्दूरमिति श्रुतं त्रिभुवने पुण्यस्थलं निस्तुलं  
यत्रास्ते जगदीश्वरः स भगवान् श्रीपद्मनाभो हरिः ॥"
2. "जय विजयी भव, देवदेवोत्तम, देवतासार्वभौम,  
अखिलाण्डकोटिब्रह्माण्डनायक, श्रीपद्मनाभ वराहू ॥"

In Andhra Pradesh, in the Sree Thirupati Venkatachalapathy and allied temples, at the end of such recitations in the words *Bahu Parak* are uttered. They translate as terms denoting great respect. *Bharahoo* or *Varahoo* could be the colloquial form of the term.

1. *Syanandoora is the city of fame without equal in the three worlds, which completely annihilated the supreme ego of the city of Indra (Suparva Nagari) and which is the mansion wherein Lakshmi Devi, the celestial daughter of the Milky Ocean, dances and plays. Sree Padmanabha, the Lord of the Universe, resides in that city.*

(‘Lakshmi’ is a synonym of ‘Sree’, both of which stand for prosperity as well. That connotation has also to be taken into account.)

2. The direct address to the Deity translates as follows:

*"Be victorious, all victorious oh Lord! most exalted Divinity of all (divinities), Grand Monarch, Paramount Sovereign of the entire cosmic super-structure of the collective universe of crores of heavenly systems, Sree Padmanabha, the most venerated One."*

## VI. Manipravalam Literature

Though the court language was Sanskrit, Sree Swathi Thirunal composed in other languages as well as has been mentioned earlier. Malayalam and *Manipravalam* are seen especially in the romantic *Padams* where separation and subsequent yearning of the beloved (here Sree Swathi Thirunal himself) to be united with the Lover (the Lord) throbs through the lines. The detailed description of the *Utsavam* of the Temple is another theme of continuing appreciation. An example is given from the *Utsava Prabandham*.



This is a comparatively simple work detailing in crystal clear terms and sparkling style the ten day *Utsavam* of Sree Padmanabha Swamy. Comprising 43 *Slokas* and 13 songs it unfolds the day to day celebration with special emphasis on the *Vahanas* used by the three Deities. Significant is the rendering on the 9th and 10th days of the festival which are the *Palli Vetta* and the *Arat*. By the grace of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, the festivals continue without fundamental changes.

The third day's procession on the *Kamala Vahanam* is perhaps couched in the most enchanting terms but constraints of space bring in the necessity of quoting only a small portion. A few lines from the *Arat* are included.

“നാഗശയനനാം ശ്രീപദ്മനാഭനുത്സവാന്ത്യദിനേ  
സാഗരത്തിലാറാടുവാൻ സരസ്വതരം ഖഗ-  
നായകാരുഢനായി ശ്രീനരഹരിയോടും കാരൊത്ത-  
കായരുചിയാം ഗോപികാകണ്ണവനോടും കൂടി  
പരിചിലെഴുന്നള്ളും ഘോഷം പറവതിന്നു ശക്ത-  
നായിദ്ധരണിയിലാറാനുമുണ്ടായി വരുമോ”

“Will there be anybody in this world capable enough to describe the joyous ceremonial procession of Him who reclines on the serpent (Sree Padmanabha) as He proceeds for the immersion or Arat in the sea on the concluding day (of the festival). He journeys sitting atop the Bird (Garuda) accompanied by Sree Narahari (Narasimha Moorthy) and the dark-rain-cloud-hued One, the Lord of the Gopikas (Sree Krishna).”

## VII. Other Works

Since the sumtotal of the compositions comes to an awesome number which includes one *Attakkatha* (*Kathakali* composition) as well, more inroads on this field are not attempted except to quote one stanza from the *Doota Vakyam* (*Attakkatha*).

“भोगीन्द्रभोगकृततल्पतले शयानं  
भोगीन्द्रभूषणपितामहमुख्यवन्द्यम् ।  
भूभारनाशनकृते विविधावतारं  
भूनायकं कमलनाभमहं नमामि ॥”

“I prostrate before Sree Padmanabha, the Lord of the Goddess Earth, who reposes on the couch fashioned of the form of Ananta, who is worshipped by the snake-ornamented Siva and Brahma, the creator and so on and who takes different incarnations to remove the burden of the world.”

(1) From the rare documents brought to light by curator Sri Sambasiva Sastri from the Government Archives etc.



(2) Hand-written manuscript of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal

(3) Other sources – Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, Kizhakkai Madhom Govinda Pillai Nair.

## Irayimman Thampi

A contemporary of Sree Swathi Thirunal, Irayimman Thampi was an accomplished scholar with great felicity of expression. His creations too form an integral component of modern literature along with the famous Swathi contributions.

A stanza of homage to Sree Padmanabha Swamy couched in Sanskrit which is common to all Thampi's *Kathakali* works is included below.

“श्रीकण्ठब्रह्ममुख्यत्रिदशपरिवृढस्तूयमानापदानं  
श्रीकण्ठाश्लेषलग्नप्रसुमरधुसृणारक्तहारांकितांगम् ।  
कारुण्याभोनिधानं करकलितगदाशंखचक्रारविन्दं  
राजच्छुभ्रेतराभ्रद्युतिमिह भजत श्रेयसे पद्मनाभं ।”

*“For deriving prosperity (oh world), worship Sree Padmanabha Swamy whose narrations of greatness are lauded by divinities of eminence like Siva and Brahma, whose bosom sports strands of pearls exhibiting a flush of pink transferred from the (red) kumkumam on Lakshmi Devi which gets rubbed off on them as she embraces His neck, who is the vast Ocean of Mercy and whose hands display the conch, the cosmic wheel, the mace and the lotus and who possesses the colour of brilliant black clouds.”*

## Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran

The mid 19th century produced a scholar of brilliance of awesome dimensions in Kerala Varma (of Anantapuram Palace, Haripad) who exhibited equal mastery over Sanskrit and Malayalam. He has 45 books to his credit.

The following lines are from *Sree Padmanabhapadapadmasatakam* in Malayalam.

“പാരം ദയാകര! ഭവച്ചരണാരവിന്ദ-  
മാരന്ധാര നുകരും മമചിത്തഭൃങ്ഗം  
പൗരന്ദരോന്നതപദത്തെ യുമിന്ദിരേശ!  
ദ്വരം ദരിദ്രതയിൽ മജ്ജിതമായ് നിനയ്ക്കും”

*“Oh Padmanabha! Embodiment of mercy! my mind which is a bee having sucked the nectarine flow from the lotus of Your sacred feet, will deem even an exalted place in Heaven as one of utter poverty.”*



## A.R. Raja Raja Varma Koil Thampuran

Another great luminary hailing from Anantapuram Palace, Raja Raja Varma flourished at the start of the 20th century. At the request of the Pushpanjali Swamiyar of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, he composed a set of poems in Sanskrit describing the Lord. One stanza is quoted:

“कौमोदकीकमलकार्मुककम्बुचुम्बि-  
पाणिं पयोधितनयापरिगूढकण्ठम् ।  
कर्णस्फुरन्मकरकुण्डलकम्रगण्डं  
कारुण्यमन्दहसितोच्छ्वसिताधरोष्ठम् ॥”

*“He whose hands are adorned with the mace, lotus, bow and conch, Who is embraced by Goddess Lakshmi, daughter of the Ocean of Milk, whose cheeks are beautified by swaying eardrops, whose lips are half-open with the smile of compassion, salutation to that Padmanabha”.*

## Narasimha Bharathi Swamigal

His Holiness Kamalananda Narasimha Bharathi Swamigal of Nelamavu Mutt of N. Karnataka, a great scholar, composed a series of 13 stanzas in praise of Sree Padmanabha Swamy during his visit to this city as part of his pilgrimage. While the exact date is not available, it was in this century itself and before 1928 (when he attained *Samadhi*). The language is Sanskrit.

“हरति कलुषजालं जन्मजन्मान्तरीयं  
जनयति सुकृतौघं बन्धमोक्षैकबीजम् ।  
वितरति महिमालिं निष्कलङ्कां विचित्रां  
स्मरणपरजने ते संस्मृतिः पद्मनाभ! ॥”

*The meditation of You, O Padmanabha! annihilates the accumulated sins of previous births, produces immeasurable merit, the causative factor which gains release from bondage and distributes wonderful and untainted glory to Your devotees who ever remember You.*

## Contemporary Writers:

### Thulasivanam

One among the most significant of the modern literary luminaries is the scholar administrator Sri R. Ramachandran Nair (IAS) writing under the pen name ‘Thulasivanam’. The massive body of literature produced by him is devotional in nature with verses of praise, *Kathakali* works and classical musical compositions in Sanskrit and Malayalam and carries a lyrical beauty. A stanza and a song are quoted:



1. “लक्ष्मीपते! लसदनन्तपुराधिवास!  
 दाक्षिण्यनिर्भर! सुरेश! हरे! मुरारे!  
 लोकार्तिनाशकर! मामव दीनबन्धो!  
 श्रीपद्मनाभ! जलदाभ! भुजंगशायिन्! ॥”

*“Oh Hari, Murari, Padmanabha, Lord of Lakshmi  
 Who resides in the charming city of Anantapuram,  
 Who is full of mercy,  
 Who is the grand monarch of all celestials  
 Who is the destroyer of the sorrows of the entire humanity  
 Who is the friend of the distressed,  
 Who radiates the colour of clouds and  
 Who rests on the serpent-bed,  
 Pray protect me.”*

The following lines are composed for a classical rendering; the *Ragam* is *Naatta*.

“श्रीपद्मना..... भं  
 दिनमनु चेतः स्मर जलदाभम्  
 शतसूर्यशोभं शठकोपम्  
 शतमखपूजितनिरुपमरूपम्  
 कम्बुगदाम्बुजचक्रविधानम्  
 करुणामधुभरितोत्पलनयनम्  
 काननतुलसीदलरतचरणम् ॥”

*“Oh mind, remember every day Sree Padmanabha  
 Who assumes the shade of clouds,  
 Who takes on the brilliance of hundred odd suns,  
 Who vents His ire (on negative forces)  
 Whose incomparable form is worshipped by Indra,  
 Who holds the conch, mace, lotus and disc in His hands,  
 Whose lotus-eyes brim with the nectar of compassion,  
 Who removes the evils of the Age of Kali,  
 Who is the Beloved of Lakshmi and  
 Whose feet take delight in (the) worship with leaves of the  
 forest Thulasi”*



### Prof. A.V. Sankaran

An acknowledged scholar, the Professor has to his credit an impressive collection of literature both in Sanskrit and Malayalam, mainly religious in character. Inspired by his devotion to Sree Chattambi Swamy Thiruvadigal, he has produced a Marathon work of 60 thousand stanzas – *Theerthapada Puranam* in Sanskrit and also a praiseworthy composition *Bhattarakappana* in Malayalam. Two stanzas written by him on Sree Padmanabha Swamy are quoted below:—

1. “सद्म नानागुणालीनां  
छद्मना रहितं विभुम् ।  
पद्मनाभं भजे भूम्या  
पद्मया च निषेवितम् ॥”

*“I adore the Supreme Lord Sree Padmanabha  
Who is the abode of manifold qualities of excellence,  
Who is totally devoid of deception and  
Who is served by the Goddesses Lakshmi and Bhoomi”*

2. “मत्स्यं कूर्मं वराहं मनुजमृगपतिं वामनं चाथ रामं  
रामं रामं च कृष्णं खलजनपटलीखण्डनं खड्गिसंज्ञम् ।  
ईडे श्रीपद्मनाभं कलनलिनदलश्यामलं वैष्णवानां  
पुण्यं साङ्गानुषङ्गं धरणितलगतं भूरिदं पारिजातम् ॥”

*“I worship Sree Padmanabha  
Who assumed various forms like that of a fish,  
A tortoise, a boar, a man-lion combination,  
Parasurama, Reghurama, Balarama, Krishna,  
Khadgi the destroyer of demonic hordes,  
Who is dark-tinted as the petals of the lovely blue lotus  
Whose person is the personified moral and religious merit acquired  
by Vaishnavites and  
Who is the Paarijaatha tree of the earth as a bestower of all desires.”*

### Dr. Sambasivan

Dr. Sambasivan, an internationally recognised neuro-surgeon by profession, comes from a long line of *Vaideeks* who carries out his work and *Tantram* together in his daily life. A *Vedic* scholar, he has been the author of many devotional renderings.



“जयतु जयतु स्यानन्दूरपुरस्थो देवः  
 जयतु जयतु सालग्रामस्वरूपी देवः  
 जयतु जयतु भुजगेन्द्रतल्पस्थो देवः  
 जयतु जयतु योगनिद्रामुद्रितो देवः  
 जयतु जयतु वज्रिवंशप्रदीपो देवः  
 जयतु जयतु पद्मनाभप्रसिद्धो देवः ॥”

*“Hail, hail! supreme Lord  
 Who resides in the city of Syanandoora,  
 Who assumes the form of Salagrama,  
 Who reposes on the couch of the Serpent lord,  
 Who is characterised by blissful cosmic slumber  
 Who is the light of the Vanchi dynasty,  
 Who is famed as Sree Padmanabha”*

### Dr. V. S. Sharma

Academician, scholar, musicologist and author of many books, Prof. Sharma is a well known figure in literary circles. His writings cover weighty works like a study on *Bala Rama Bharatham* by Dharmaraja, Sree Swathi Thirunal's works, history and so on.

He prays to Sree Padmanabha Swamy hailing Him as the quintessence of *Advaita Vidya* and as One without beginning or end, to pardon him for all misdoings and to save him from suffering. A few lines in Sanskrit read thus:

“स्यानन्दूरपुराधिपं भक्तानामानन्ददायकं प्रणतोऽस्म्यहम् ।  
 ज्ञानातीतं कालातीतं सकलतत्त्वातीतं पद्मनाभं स्मरामि ॥”

*“I prostrate myself before the Lord of Syanandoorapura, One who bestows bliss on devotees, Oh Padmanabha! who is above all knowledge, time and philosophical ponderings. My mind is full of thoughts of Thee.”*

### A Stuti of Sree Padmanabha

This work stands by itself as a Hindi verse currently chanted by the priests of the Sree Purushothama Rama Temple in Deva Prayag. The author of this hymn is unknown and its age undefined.

Apart from the general characteristics seen in the *Anantasayee Pratishtas* in India two factors lead one to conclude that it is the Sree Padmanabha in Thiruvananthapuram who features here.

The Lord is lauded as He who gave refuge to Sree Paramasiva. There seems to be no temple other than this Temple which is of such fame as to fit in with



the description given. The priests claim to have originated from near the River Thamravarni in the South. (Both Tamil Nadu and Malayala Nadu claim to have a river of this name though now the latter is known differently).

“शेषसाई विष्णु भगवान  
 फण पर लेते भगवान  
 तेरे मुखारविन्द देखो  
 सारे संसार को एक क्षण में भस्मकरनेवाले  
 शंकरजी को शरण दिया।  
 सारा पाप मिटेगा  
 नाभिकमल देखो  
 सारे संसार का सृष्टिकर्ता ब्रह्माजी  
 कमल के ऊपर निकला।  
 इसे देखकर संसार पार करना आसान  
 चरणारविन्द देखो - पुनर्जन्म न हो।”

*“Oh Bhagavan Vishnu who is Anantasayee  
 (You) repose on the coiled form of the Serpent  
 Look at Your lotus-like face!  
 You gave refuge to Sankarji who reduces  
 To ashes the whole world within the fraction of a second;  
 All sins will be expiated,  
 View the lotus arising from the navel,  
 Brahma the Creator of the entire universe  
 Sits on top of that lotus.  
 It is easy to cross over the world on seeing this (vision);  
 Gaze at those flower-like-feet, there will be no further re-birth.”*

### Maharani Karthika Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi

Present Mootha Thampuran of Attingal, she is well-versed in Indian languages and English, especially in the classical style. This prayer rises up from her innermost being:

*Sree Padmanabha Swamy, my refuge!  
 I prostrate at Thy feet  
 Not for health, wealth, power or fame  
 But only for seeking  
 Thy forgiveness for my failings.  
 Lord! grant me the ability*



*To repeat Thy hallowed name  
So that in my humble heart  
Is enshrined  
Thy resplendent form  
For my total surrender.*

### **Maharaja Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma**

Present Valia Thampuran of the Travancore Royal Family, the devotion of his ancient blood finds expression in his many writings.

“That”

That

*For which there are no words to describe  
No eyes for the vision to behold  
No ears for the Nada to absorb*

*Yet that is*

*Sree Padmanabha*

*Who*

*In Bhooloka Vaikuntha manifests  
For Bhaktaanugrahakaaranam<sup>33</sup>  
As fountain-head of blessings  
Encompassing all, to grant worship.*

### **Punartham Thirunal Sreekumara Varma**

Sreekumara Varma, who is the grandson of the Regent Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi, has made a name for himself not only in homeland but also outside as a playwright and poet of note. This inspired poem bears witness to the poet's deathless *Bhakti* to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

#### **My Prayer**

*When freedom, country, friends and kin,  
the highs and lows of pleasure-pain,  
have sunk me, life-eroded spirit-  
My soul prepares to meet the flame:  
refuge and joyous bondage!  
Sree Padmanabha, accept me home.*

---

33. To bestow benediction on devotees.



## 16

## IN MAJESTIC SLAVERY

## The Institution of Sree Padmanabha Dasas

A work on the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple of Syanandoorapuram (Thiruvananthapuram) will be devoid of completion, if a little space is not devoted to the *Dasas* of Sree Padmanabha Perumal. The very term 'Dasa' contains much meaning and in the context it is used here, it gains great indepth beauty as well. In rough translation Dasa means a slave. Had a term like servant or vassal been used, the import would have at once become diluted. A servant has the option to leave and a vassal has a status of his own, independent of the overlord, whereas choice is not available for the slave nor does he have claim to a separate identity. He and his successors are forever bound to the master. This same idea is mirrored in the term 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa', but with a difference. Normal slavery is harsh and indicative of forced dependence. In this case it is a state of affairs voluntarily and emotionally embraced by ancient Kshatriya blue blood which signed the roll call of distinction with destiny for all time by gaining for itself the supreme honour of majestic slavery.

Contrary to a popular mis-conception, 'Sree Padmanabha Dasas'<sup>1</sup> existed far back in time, long before Sree Anizhom Thirunal Veera Bala Marthanda Varma conducted his famed *Thrippati Danam*. Many are the cadjan records where some mention or other appears, related to this aspect. There is reason to

---

1. The names of the existing male members of this branch of the Travancore Royal Family who have been surrendered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy on the Ottakkal Mandapam to gain the title of distinction of Sree Padmanabha Dasa are given below:

1. Sree Padmanabha Dasa Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma Valia Thampuram.
2. Sree Padmanabha Dasa Moolom Thirunal Rama Varma Elaya Thampuram.
3. Sree Padmanabha Dasa Pooruruttathi Thirunal Marthanda Varma.
4. Sree Padmanabha Dasa Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma.
5. Sree Padmanabha Dasa Avittom Thirunal Adithya Varma.



believe that the concept of 'Sree Padmanabha Dasas' was not an unfamiliar one even in the Fifteen Hundreds. While from the time of the Ay Kings who feature well before the advent of Christ, Sree Padmanabha Swamy commanded a special place in the scheme of affairs of the dynasties of this land as *Ishta Devata* (personal God), *Kutumba Devata* (family God), *Kula Devata* (dynastic God) and finally as the Sovereign *Devata* who owned the land and its lords, no correct date has been arrived at as to when the rulers initially assumed this title of honour. The 16th century ruler, King Bhoothala Veera Rama Varma had the title 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' prefixed to his name as is revealed from records of his time (Refer chapter *Autograph of Ages* – Medieval History). Coming much further down to the modern age, there is a scroll recording the surrender of Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma Dharmaraja being submitted as 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' to the *Perumal* on his first birthday. Sree Karthika Thirunal was already the 'Yuvaraja', leading men into battle and victory at the time of the *Thrippati Danam*. All this clearly proves the existence of this title before this momentous event.

As the scrolls of history unravel, the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and the Throne of Travancore came to be more and more interlinked, sharing a common fortune. If in the course of its evolution Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was initially owned by the State and its sovereigns, with the *Thrippati Danam* of Marthanda Varma the Great, this Temple, and its presiding Deity Sree Padmanabha Perumal, came to own the State. The historic Deed of Dedication which was an epoch-making event took place under the asterism *Revati* on Wednesday the 5th of the Malayalam month of *Makaram* in the year 925 ME corresponding to the 18th or 19th of January 1750 AD. With this, all the lands falling within Travancore including future additions, all rights and privileges enjoyed by the rulers and the status of Supreme Monarch of the State came to be vested in 'Sree Padmanabha Swamy'. So also the personal insignia 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa' enjoyed by the Travancore Royalty became converted to the official designation of all the male members of the family as the cherished title of the highest honour. It continues as an unbroken, ongoing tradition.

The right to rulership as God's representative, as executant of Divine Will, thus came to be enjoyed as a privilege by this dynasty from 925 ME/1750 AD onwards.

On the first birthday of each male child born into the House of Travancore, the baby is initially taken to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple by the mother. A *Puliyilakkara Neryathu* (a white *Mundu* with black border traditionally worn by persons of standing) is spread on the *Ottakkal Mandapam* and the little one is placed on it by the mother along with grains of rice and *Thulasi* leaves and



after sprinkling of water, offered to Sree Padmanabha Swamy as His *Dasa*. The seniormost among the Palace attendants employed for services connected with the Temple, takes the child from the *Mandapam*. After receiving *Teertham* and *Prasadam* and worshipping at all the shrines, the baby prince is taken back to the Palace.

It is with this act of submission known as *Atimayital* meaning 'Surrender as a Slave', that this child gains the right to be called 'Sree Padmanabha Dasa.'

*Vattaka Prasadam* is given exclusively to the members of the Royal Family by the designated priests. Apart from *Thulasi Teertham* and *Panchagavyam*, it consists of sandal paste in a circular silver container, Jasmine and *Thulasi* strings made up into a medium-sized ball, *Thulasi* bunch with sandal ball, tender coconut and betel leaf with acrecanut. They are arranged in a big round silver salver and collectively termed *Vattaka Prasadam*. It is the privilege of this family to receive the *Prasadam* from the central entrance of the *Sreekovil*, standing on the *Ottakkal Mandapam*, while others receive *Prasadam* from the *Mandapam* at the entrance of the sacred feet of the Lord. (It is not distributed at the entrance near the Crown).

The function known as *Pati* and *Patiyettam* performed in many instances is the next significant one in the family. The individuals performing this ceremony offer a length of red silk with a specified amount of money in coins at the central entrance of the *Sreekovil*. This money is the *Pati*, a royal levy, submitted by the concerned individual to the Supreme *Perumal*. With this the *Patiyettam* (elevation in position) becomes established. For this function the side step on the south is used to ascend the *Ottakkal Mandapam*. In the case of an adoptee, after this ritual she becomes entitled to receive the *Vattaka Prasadam* as a member of the family. This ceremony is performed in the presence of the Valia Thampuran, the seniormost lady member of the family who is the Attingal Mootha Thampuran, other members of the Royal Family and representatives of the Kshatriya clans, local dignitaries, officials of the Temple and Palace. The Swamiyars, Tantries of the Temple and the other members of the *Ettara Yogam* are present at their assigned places to witness this act of self surrender to Sree Padmanabha Perumal.

For all the male members, *Pati* and *Patiyettam* takes place not only on the first birthday but also after the sacred ritual of the investiture of the holy thread — *Upanayanam*. For those among them who assume the position of Thrippappoor Mooppan (Yuvaraja) and of Chiravayi Mooppan (Maharaja), this procedure is once more repeated at that time.

2. This title is gained by every male child after this ceremony of submission and not when he becomes the Valia Thampuran as is commonly believed.



Among the ladies of the family, *Pati* and *Patiyettam* is conducted after the marriage. In the event of adoption, the adoptee who is necessarily a female, also has to perform this function to get confirmation as a member of the family. Should it be a lady who ascends the Throne, she too is required to follow this custom. The Temple scrolls record in great detail the *Pati* and *Patiyettam* of Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, the only Queen who ruled the fair land of Travancore in her own right and not as Regent. It is mandatory for a Regent too to perform this function before taking charge.

The significance of this function is projected by the fact that the Temple honours accorded to the royalty after demise are available only to those members who have performed it. Numerous are the *Churunas* (scrolls) in support of this. When a member of the family passes away, *Pattu* and *Kacha* (a red silk and a white cloth) are sent to be put on the body, from the Temple. In the case of an actual ruler, the heavy-gold-worked pure silk, covering *Thiru Utayatayalam* of the main Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy, is removed and used to cover the body. It is consigned to the flames along with this silk. *Mathilakam* Records are available registering the *Pattu* sent for each of the rulers. The last personage to receive this final tribute was Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma in 1991. The Periya Nambi, whose duty is to give *Teertham* and *Vattaka Prasadam* daily to the Valia Thampuram when he goes to the Temple for worship, has to give the same for the last time to that inert form. The *Pattu* is brought along at that time by the other priests and handed over to cover the body.

One deviation is being mentioned here. Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi ruled as the Regent till Sree Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma came of age. Though transfer of power was carried out, her nephew who held her in the highest esteem, bestowed on her all rights of a reigning Sovereign. As such, when she passed away, all Temple honours including the Lord's silk were accorded to her.

Another great blessing is reserved only for the rulers or heads of the family after demise. A flame is taken from the perpetual lamp inside the sanctum of Sree Padmanabha Swamy and the main lamp kept near the body is lit with it.<sup>3</sup> This flame finally ignites the pyre.

The *Ponnum Siveli* processions, the extra *Otta Thulappayasam* and decorations with banana bunches, *Kulavazha Chirappu*,<sup>4</sup> used to be done on the annual birth asterism of the late rulers. *Otta Thulappayasam* offering continues. Instead of the actual *Chirappu*, a lumpsum is remitted to the Temple on these asterisms.

3. Refer Section 6 Sree Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma – Modern History.

4. On the first birthday after Sree Chithira Thirunal's demise, a full scale *Kulavazha Chirappu* as of old was conducted.



Apart from these benedictions which are personal in nature and bestowed on the family by the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, there are some functions and duties of the Temple which fall upon the Valia Thampuran exclusively. Before entering into that subject, a small part of history is being briefly touched upon.

In the medieval ages, there was a bifurcation of duties with the Chiravayi Mooppan ruling the State and the next in line, the Thrippappoor Mooppan, being in charge of the administration of all temples with special emphasis on the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. While his uncle Maharaja Rama Varma reigned as the Chiravayi Mooppan, Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma ruled as the Thrippappoor Mooppan. He inherited a land of anarchy and unrest. The events consequent on his succession are well known. As a result he virtually did away with the division of power and duties and as the person most responsible to his Deity, took over the Temple administration directly, clipping the wings of the till then powerful *Ettara Yogam*. Thus the discharge of all duties and performance of functions came to be concentrated in the ruler himself making it impossible for him to divest himself of the same.

The ruler is an indispensable member of the *Ettara Yogam* consisting of the Pushpanjali Swamiyar heading the Council, six Potties (Tulu Brahmins) and a Nair known as Karanatta Kurup. The Swamiyar apart, all the others hail from hereditary families. The Valia Thampuran forms the *Ara* (or half component) of the *Yogam*. Another interpretation to the term *Ara* exists, pointing out that the term is equated with royalty and that as such the Council itself should mean the 'King's Council of Eight'. Whatever that be, the Swamiyar and the ruler are inevitable in the sessions of the *Yogam*. At present it functions mainly as an assembly that ratifies actions or as an assenting body. Today, by law, the Valia Thampuran is the Chief Trustee of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

A sacred and private ritual termed *Thirumudi Kalasam* is performed after a Valia Thampuran takes charge. It is done by the Tantri who acknowledges the divinity in the ruler and honours it. It is a prerequisite to his participation in the *Utsavam* as the Valia Thampuran (Refer chapter *Worship of the Celestial*).

The legendary sword belonging to Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma which he submitted to Sree Padmanabha Swamy during *Thrippati Danam* is carried by a Brahmin who precedes the Valia Thampuran as he goes to the Temple for his routine worship. When occasion demands he carries it himself as of right. It is his privilege to worship all alone; none of the family members can accompany him.

As each new Valia Thampuran assumes office a new *Nivedyam* is introduced. Certain constraints are imposed on his movements. In case of absence from the



city, he has to remit a daily fine in rupees and conduct a *Payasam* offering to atone for the same. Being fully answerable to the Temple, many a time he is called upon to pay a penalty for errors committed by someone else.

The participation of the Valia Thampuran is required for the *Utsava Anujna*, *Brahma Kalasam*, *Thiruvilakkam* as well as for waking up the Perumal after *Arat* and for *Vishu*. He has the blessing of accompanying the Deities during the first of the three rounds of their circumambulation through the *Sivelippura* during the biannual *Utsavas* and other special *Sivelies* and of performing the *Palli Vetta* ceremony and leading the *Vetta* and *Arat* processions, the historic *Udavaal* (sword) in hand. It is his duty to receive the Deities inside the Fort walls as they return from the *Arat*. Should his absence become unavoidable for *Vetta* and *Arat* due to ill-health or pollution, with his formal consent, the Kshetrakaryam Potti, a member of the *Ettara Yogam* who is in direct charge of Temple matters, substitutes for him and leads the processions, sword in hand.

On *Thiru Onam* day in the month of *Chingom*, which is deemed to be the birthday of the Swamy, the Valia Thampuran submits a five finger broad gold-lace *Mundu* (dhoti), one pure brocade length and two thousand rupees to Sree Padmanabha Swamy and one gold-lace *Mundu* each to Sree Narasimha Swamy and Sree Krishna Swamy. Out of the two sets of three traditional bows made for this occasion, which are called *Ona Villu*, one set is for the ruler by right.

On *Vishu* day the Valia Thampuran receives a coin from the Periya Nambi as a gift indicating prosperity. It is given to the ruler on behalf of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

The *Bhadradeepam* used to be a complex ritual spread over seven days, with the *Deepam* being lit on the last day which coincided with the solstices of mid January (*Makara Siveli*) and mid July (*Karkkataka Siveli*). The ruler had to observe many restrictions and spend the days in prayer, fasting and silence, speaking only in Sanskrit if it became unavoidable. This festival was primarily for the prosperity of the ruler and his family.<sup>5</sup> With the ushering of the political changes, Sree Chithira Thirunal discontinued it as it was for personal advantage, channelising that money too to keep the Temple-related functions going.

Though no longer relevant, two *Maha Danas* which used to be performed by each of the rulers despite all odds are featured here because of the vital role they once played in the scheme of affairs. They are the grand *Hiranyagarbham* and *Thulapurusha Danam*, which rank among the most lavish of the sixteen great gifts listed in the ancient texts. The rulers could perform the

5. *Once the Bhadradeepam (flame) unfortunately got extinguished during the reign of Maharaja Moolam Thirunal. On hearing of it, he declared that, that was his last Bhadradeepam. It proved to be correct.*



*Hiranyagarbham* only after they had reigned for a specified number of years. The big stone vessel which is found in the corner of the *Kulashekhara Mandapam* into which sacred waters were poured and in which the King used to immerse himself, stands now as a silent reminder of those stupendous events. The actual *Hiranyagarbham* would follow later. The *Thulapurusha Danam* could be performed as a sequel or at some other convenient time. Since both these *Danas* have been detailed in the chapter *Worship of the Celestial*, a repetition here would be superfluous. They were of utmost importance as the rulers could assume the ancient and coveted title of '*Kulasekhara Perumal*' only after their conduct. On this occasion alone would the fabled crown of the '*Kulasekhara Perumals*' bearing the replica of the sacred Feet of Sree Padmanabha Swamy be placed on their heads by the officiating Tantri.

A rough sketch is thus presented of this historic institution of sublime submission and slavery, born of depthless devotion, nurtured by devotion and continuing to grow in devotion to Sree Padmanabha Swamy. As the Master and the Beloved, He continues to play on the heart-strings of generations of His *Dasas* making their souls sing out in adoration at His divine behest.



# Sree Padmanabha!

That serfdom thrills,  
Legacy of centuries  
Call me a serf, a slave,  
What is there in a name?

I am a serf, slave and more  
Dust under Your feet  
Held captive not in chains  
But in beloved bondage  
Of truth eternal.

I am Yours to make or mar  
My craft frail at your shores  
I am Yours to take or leave  
Yet my being to You doth cleave  
As your bondmaid.

I seek no rights, demand no claims  
But beg the bounty  
Of your love.

Oh Sire! Sree Padmanabha!

If I be Yours  
Your mantle of grace  
Needs must descend  
It is Your right to care  
For Your own.

And I, Your vassal  
Fettered unto You  
In silken strands  
Of bliss.

Juni Lalbhai Baji.  
Awarathi Thirumal.



## CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

- Parasurama instituted the complex ceremonies, the *Thulapurusha Danam* and *Hiranyagarbham* and gave foremost prominent place.
- 225 ME/1050 AD – First known renovation of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple was during the time of Cheraman Perumal Bhaskara Ravi Varma III.
- 600 ME/1425 AD – Steps for collection and preservation of the *Mathilakam* Records was instituted by King Veera Iravi Iravi Varma.
- 634 ME/1459 AD – 636 ME/ 1459 AD – Installation of the *Ottakkal Mandapam* in front of the inner shrine.
- 644 ME/1469 AD – Construction of an square shaped granite well during the reign of the King Rama Marthanda Varma.
- 677 ME/1502 AD – Orders to make the *Ona Villu* to be submitted to Sree Padmanabha Perumal on *Thiru Onam* day was issued by Veera Iravi Varma.
- 695 ME/1520 AD – King Bhoothala Veera Rama Varma's name is preceded by the distinctive title '*Sree Padmanabha Dasa*'.
- 741 ME/1565 AD – In chronicles, the fourteenth day in the month of *Thulam* (October/November) saw the foundation being laid for the imposing eastern *Raja Gopuram* was cited by King Adithya Varma.
- 802 ME/1627 AD – The procedure was laid down for the great royal feast of the Perumal – the *Perumthiru Amrithethu Puja* to take place twice a year after each solstice by King Iravi Iravi Varma and Unni Kerala Varma. The practice continues.
- 904 ME/1729 AD – Renovation of the Temple commences under direct supervision of Maharaja Marthanda Varma with Kesavan Vishnu Thrathan Namboodiri of *Thycaud Illom* at the helm of affairs
- 908 ME/1733 - 3rd of *Painkuni* – The work starts on *Katu-Sarakara Moola Vighram* with twelve thousand and eight *Salagramas* by expert icon maker, Balaranya Koni Deva.
- 912 ME/1737 AD – After the first legendary *Bhadradeepam* by King Karthaveeryarjuna the next *Bhadradeepam* on record seems to be this one by Maharaja Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma.



914 ME/1739 AD – In the month of *Mithunam* June/July on the ninth day the Tantri, Tarananalloor Padmanabha Parameswaran, of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple conducted the consecration of the present *Moola Vighram*.

914 ME/1739 AD – The impressive *Sivelippura* was constructed by Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma.

914 ME/1739 AD – Master sculptor Anantha Padmanabhan of whom the Maharaja Marthanda Varma bestowed the title *Anantha Padmanabha Moothashari*, honoured him with a pair of *Attathodu Veerashrinkhala* bangles for both hands and also gave him and his family a permanent place for worship in the Temple.

922 ME/1747 AD – *Murajapam* was started under the commands of Maharaja Marthanda Varma.

925 ME/1750 AD – Two golden events – 5th day of the month of *Makaram* – 18th or 19th of January stood witness to the submission of sublime devotion, the *Thrippati Danam* to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by Maharaja Sree Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma – and the *Lakshadeepam* festival when Sree Padmanabha Swamy is worshipped with that number of lamps. It takes place once in six years.

933 ME/1758 AD – The fabulous *Kulasekhara Mandapam* complete with the musical pillars was built by the the chief sculptor, Mootha Panickar Thottathu Ashari during the reign of Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma.

995 ME/1820 AD – A very big mural mirroring the *Ananthasayanam* – the main Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy claim the distinction of being the biggest temple murals in Kerala, was drawn by a Brahmin Master artist Chalayil Kalahasthi during the period of Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi.

1014 ME/1839 AD – *Ambalappuzha Palppayasa Nivedyam* was instituted by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal.

1112 ME/1936 AD – The epoch making event, the *Kshetra Praveshana Vilambaram* or the Temple Entry Proclamation by Maharaja Sree Chithira Thirunal.



## GLOSSARY AND transliteration



- Abhayam* (Abhayam) □ Refuge.
- Abhishekam* (Abhiṣēkam) □ Oblation with liquid medium, made sacred.
- Abhisravana Mandapam* (Abhiśṛavaṇa Maṇḍapam) □ An important front Mandapam inside the Temple.
- Achyuta* (Acyuta) □ Another name of Viṣṇu.
- Achyutarayabhyudayam* (Acyutarāyābhyudayam) □ Sanskrit epic poem - 15th century.
- Adhamam* □ Lowest, basest.
- Adhana* (Adhāṇa) □ A classical Ragam.
- Adhyayam* (Adhyāyam) □ Chapter.
- Adi* (Ādi) □ Initial, first.
- Adi Kesava* (Ādi Kēśava) □ Vishnu, Deity of Thiruvattar Temple.
- Adi Brahma* (Ādi Brahma) □ Initial Brahma.
- Adi Sesha* (Ādi Śēṣa) □ Ananta, the snake king.
- Advitham* (Advaitam) □ Non-duality.
- Agamas* (Āgamas) □ Collection of traditional doctrines.
- Agastya Muni* (Agastya Muṇi) □ A great sage who has highly significant connections with Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Agastya Teerthan/Brahma Teertham* (Agastya Tīrtham/Brahma Tīrtham) □ Temple tank of Sree Mithranandapuram.
- Aghora* (Aghōra) □ Fierce.
- Agni* (Agni) □ Fire.
- Agnihotram* (Agniḥōtram) □ Keeping a sacred and perpetual fire of worship going.
- Agni-konu* (Agni-kōṇu) □ South eastern corner
- Agnistambhana-vidya* (Agnistambhaṇa-vidya) □ Skill of stilling fire (an Arangam of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.)
- Ahalya-moksham* (Ahalyā-mōkṣam) □ Salvation or release of Ahalya from the curse.
- Ahamkaram* (Ahaṅkāram) □ Pride.
- Agrashala* (Agraśāla) □ Dining area for Brahmins in a Temple.
- Ajnanam* (Ajñānam) □ Ignorance.
- Akasaganga* (Ākāśagaṅga) □ Ganga from the Heaven.
- Akasatatvam* (Ākāśatatvam) □ Principle of space.
- Akhilāndakotibrahmanda-nayakan* (Akhilāṇḍakōṭībrahmāṇḍa-nāyakan) □ The Supreme Ruler of the multitudinous cosmic universes.
- Akil* □ Indian Cedar (a tree).
- Akkara* (Akkara) □ Opposite or outer bank (of the river).
- Aksharam* (Akṣaram) □ Letter; that which has no destruction.
- Aksharasankhya* (Akṣarasankhya) □ Representing numbers through alphabets.
- Alagachehu* (Aḷagacehu) □ An old denomination of money.
- Alankarabhushanam* (Alaṅkārabhūṣaṇam) □ Sanskrit work of the 18th century.
- Alankaram* (Alaṅkāram) □ Decoration.



- Alankara Mandapam* (Alaṅkāra Maṇḍapam) □ Mandapam for decoration of the Vahanas.
- Alankara Priya* (Alaṅkāra Priya) □ One fond of decoration.
- Alankara Sivali* (Alaṅkāra Śivēli) □ Processing of the decorated Deity.
- Alankara-vidvans* (Alaṅkāra-vidvāṇs) □ Masters in decoration.
- Alippuram-tullal* (Ālippuṣam-tuḷḷal) □ An Arangam.
- Alpashi* (Alpaśi) □ Corresponding Thulam, the third month of the Malayalam year.
- Alvars* (Ālvāṛs) □ 12 great Vaishavite saints of South India.
- Amappalaka* (Āmappalaka) □ Oval wooden plank seat.
- Ambalappuzha Palpayasam* (Ambalappuḷa Pālpāyasam) □ Famous milk, rice and sugar, sweet liquid preparation.
- Ambalavasi* (Ambalavāsi) □ A high caste community traditionally associated with temple service.
- Amman* (Ammaṇ) □ Goddess.
- Ammana-attom* (Ammāṇa-aṭṭam) □ Jugglery.
- Amritha Kalasam* (Amṛta Kalaśam) □ Pot of nectar.
- Amrithabhisheka Vishnu* (Amṛtābhiṣēka Viṣṇu) □ Vishnu pouring nectar on Himself.
- Amritham* (Amṛtam) □ Nectar.
- Ananda Bhairavi* (Āṇaṇḍa Bhairavi) □ A classical Ragam.
- Anandam* (Āṇaṇḍam) □ Bliss.
- Anandamayakosam* (Āṇaṇḍamayakōśam) □ One of the five physical demarcations of the temple, the sreekovil denoting the heart.
- Ananta* (Aṇanta) □ Serpent king.
- Anantaasana Moorthy* (Aṇantāsaṇa Mūrty) □ Vishnu sitting on Ananta.
- Anantankatu* (Aṇantaṅkāṭu) □ Forest of Ananta the serpent.
- Anantapura Varnanam* (Aṇantapura Varṇaṇam) □ 12th/13th century Manipravalam work.
- Anantasayana Kshetram* (Aṇantaśayaṇa Kṣēṭram) □ Place/temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.
- Anantasayanam* (Aṇantaśayaṇam) □ Repose on Ananta the serpent.
- Anantasayana Mahatmyam* (Aṇantaśayaṇa Māhātmyam) □ Title of a book on greatness of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.
- Anantasayana Moorthy* (Aṇantaśayaṇa Mūrty) □ Lord reclining on Ananta.
- Anantasayana Puram* (Aṇantaśayaṇa Puram) □ Thiruvananthapuram City
- Ananta Vahanam* (Aṇanta Vāhaṇam) □ Serpent Ananta conveyance of the Lord.
- Anasooya* (Aṇasūya) □ Wife of Sage Athri.
- Ana Uruviruttal* (Āṇa Uruviruttal) □ Submission of elephant.
- Anavaal* (Āṇavāḷ) □ An important official in the Temple.
- Andi-attom* (Āṇḍi-aṭṭam) □ Folk dance by Tamils.
- Andi Pandaram* (Āṇḍi Paṇḍāram) □ One of the concepts of Sree Subramaṇya Swamy.
- Angavastram* (Aṅgavastram) □ Upper cloth used by men.
- Ani* (Āṇi) □ Corresponds to May-June of Tamil month.
- Anizhom* (Aniḷam) □ An asterism.
- Anki* (Aṅki) □ Outer covering in metal.
- Ankusam* (Aṅkuśam) □ Metalic hooked rod for controlling elephants.
- Annadanam* (Aṇṇadāṇam) □ Gift of food.
- Annam* (Aṇṇam) □ Rice, denoting food in general, swan.



- Annamayakosam* (Aṇṇamayakōśam) □ Corresponding to the stomach in the human body. When applied to a temple it stands for Sivelippura areas where food is served.
- Annam-kettu* (Aṇṇam-keṭṭu) □ Decorative swan.
- Annapoorneswari* (Aṇṇapūrṇēśvari) □ Goddess Parvathi as dispenser of food.
- Annaprasam* (Aṇṇapṛāśam) □ First rice-feeding ceremony for babies (Normally in the 6th month).
- Anujna* (Aṇujña) □ Permission, sanction.
- Anoopa-desam* (Anūpa-dēśam) □ Marshy land.
- Anushtana Grandham* (Aṇuṣṭhāṇa Graṇṭham) □ Work dealing with rites, rituals.
- Appam* □ A sweet preparation with jaggery and rice, round in shape; a popular offering to deities.
- Ara* □ Half. Also indicative of royalty.
- Ara* (Aṛa) □ Room.
- Aradhana* (Ārādhana) □ Worship.
- Arangams* (Araṇṇams) □ Art forms.
- Arasu* (Araśu), *Arayalu* (Arayālu) □ Ficus Religiosa (Banian tree).
- Arat* (Ārāt) □ Holy immersion of the deities marking the conclusion of a temple festival.
- Arat Kalasam* (Ārāt Kalaśam) □ Vedic ritual connected with the Arat.
- Aravanappayasam* (Aravaṇappāyasam) □ Jaggery and rice preparation with plenty of ghee.
- Archana* (Aṛcaṇā) □ Worship (normally with flowers).
- Ardhanareeswara* (Aṛdhanārīśvara) □ Siva in half male, half female concept.
- Ardhayama Deeparadhana* (Ardhayāma Dīpārādhana) □ Night worship with lamps.
- Aritharam* (Aritāram) □ Acacia Parnesiana.
- Arjuna* (Arjuna) □ Third among the Pandavas.
- Arundhati* □ Sage Vasishta's wife.
- Asanam* (Āsaṇam) □ Seat, sitting posture.
- Asareeri* (Aśarīri) □ Disembodied heavenly voice.
- Ashari* (Āśāri) □ Workman of carpentry trade.
- Asat* □ That which does not exist, opposit of Sat.
- Ashtabandhalepanam* (Aṣṭabandhalēpaṇam) □ Smearing with Ashtabandham.
- Ashtabandham* (Aṣṭabandham) □ A compound of eight ingredients used as binding medium.
- Ashtabandha Kalasam* (Aṣṭabandha Kalaśam) □ Purificatory ceremony after concecrating a deity with cementing mixture.
- Ashtadikpalakas* (Aṣṭadikpālākās) □ Guardians of the eight directions.
- Ashtami* (Aṣṭami) □ 8th lunar day.
- Ashtanaga Garuda* (Aṣṭanāga Garuḍa) □ Garuda with eight serpents on his body.
- Ashtapati* (Aṣṭapati) □ Famed devotional Sanskrit work comprising songs by Jayadeva of Bengal of the 12th century.
- Ashtayudha Purushas* (Aṣṭāyudha Puruṣās) □ Celestials of the Eight Weapons - Sword, Shield, Arrow, Bow, Conch, Disc, Mace and Lotus.
- Ashottara Venugopala* (Aṣṭōttara Vēṇugōpāla) □ Concept of Sree Krishna with flute in hand.
- Ashtotharasatham* (Aṣṭōtharaśatam) □ 108 holy names of a deity.
- Asokam* (Aśōkam) □ A famous Indian tree.
- Ashramam* (Āśṛamam) □ Hermitage.



- Aswarudha* (Aśvārūdha) ☐ Mounted on a horse.
- Aswatthama* (Aśvatthāma) ☐ Son of Drona, having eternal life.
- Aswathi* (Aśvati) ☐ The first asterism.
- Athazha Palppayasam* (Attāḷa Pālppāyasam) ☐ A sweet rice and milk preparation offered after dusk has fallen.
- Athazha Siveli* (Attāḷa Śivēli) ☐ Night Siveli.
- Athom* (Attam) ☐ An asterism.
- Atavadi-marmam* (Aṭavaṭi-maṛmam) ☐ Vital point in the body which can be activated by pressure.
- Athana* (Athāṇa) ☐ A classical Ragam.
- Atharva Vedam* (Athaṛva Vēdam) ☐ The 4th Vedam.
- Atimayital* (Aṭimayital) ☐ Ceremony of surrender of babies to chosen deities.
- Attakkatha* (Āṭṭakkatha) ☐ Kathakali play which is an art form of Kerala.
- Athazham* (Attāḷam) ☐ Night repast.
- Athazha Puja* (Attāḷa Pūja) ☐ Night worship.
- Attathodu Veerashrinkhala* (Aṭṭattōṭu Vīraśṛṅkhala) ☐ Gold bangle of a specific design which was a royal decoration of honour.
- Atti* ☐ *Ficus Racemosa* (A tree).
- Attingal Mootha Thampuram* (Āṭṭingal Mūṭṭa Tampurāṇ) ☐ Senior most lady of the Travancore Royal Family with time-honoured sovereign position in Attingal which once formed the exclusive and separate domain of the ladies.
- Avabhṛta Snanam* (Avabhṛta Snāṇam) ☐ Ritualistic immersion in water at the end of a special ceremony.
- Avanappalaka* (Āvaṇappalaka) ☐ Oval wooden plank seat.
- Avatharam* (Avatāram) ☐ Incarnation.
- Avittom* (Aviṭṭam) ☐ An asterism.
- Ayana Sankranti Azhakiya Manikka Siveli* (Ayaṇa Saṅkrānti Aḷakiya Māṇikka Śivēli) ☐ Ritualistic circumambulation by the picturesque name for Makara Siveli.
- Ayillyom* (Āyilyam) ☐ An asterism.
- Ay Kings* (Āy Kings) ☐ Rulers from the Ay dynasty claiming ancestry to Travancore rulers.
- Ayiramkal Mandapam* (Āyiramkāḷ Maṇḍapam) ☐ Thousand Pillared Hall
- Ayyan Adigal Thiruvadigal* (Ayyan Aṭikal Tiruvaṭikal) ☐ First well known great King of Venad.
- Ayyippilla Ashan* (Ayyippiḷḷa Āśāṇ) ☐ 14th century author of the Ramakatha Pattu.
- Ayyanpilla Ashan* (Ayyanpiḷḷa Āśāṇ) ☐ 14th century author of the Mahabharatha Pattu.
- Azhuvancheri Thamprakkal* (Aḷvāncēri Tamprākkaḷ) ☐ The acknowledged hereditary head of the Namboodiri community.

## B

- Baddha Jeevatma* (Baddhajīvātma) ☐ Individual soul in bondage.
- Bakan* ☐ Name of a demon.
- Balan* (Bālan) ☐ Boy.
- Balabhadran* ☐ 8th incarnation of Vishnu, elder brother of Sree Krishna.
- Balakrishnan* (Bālakṛṣṇan) ☐ Young Krishna.
- CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhanta eGangotri Gyaan Kosha



- Balalayam* (Bālālayam) □ Temporary sanctum of a Deity.
- Bala Marthanda Vijayam* (Bāla Mārtāṇḍa Vijayam) □ 8th century Sanskrit drama.
- Balaraman* (Balarāman) □ 8th incarnation of Vishnu, elder brother of Sree Krishna.
- Bala Rama Bharatham* (Bāla Rāma Bharatam) □ An 18th century treatise on Natya Sastra by Maharaja Karthika Thirunal (Dharmaraja).
- Balaranya Konideva* (Bālāraṇya Kōṇidēva) □ Expert icon maker, who fashioned the wondrous Idol of Sree Padmanabha Swamy in 914 ME/1739.
- Bali* (Bāli) □ Monkey king of Ramayana age.
- Bandhanam* (Bandhaṇam) □ Bondage.
- Begada* (Bēgaḍa) □ A classical Indian Ragam.
- Beejaksharam* (Bījākṣaram) □ Mystic syllables which Mantrams form.
- Beli* □ Sanctified food offering to deities.
- Belikkal* □ Stone representing divinity on which Beli is offered.
- Belikkalppura/Velikkalppura* □ A roofed enclosure where the major Belikkal is situated.
- Bhadradeepam* (Bhadraḍīpam) □ A royal ritualistic ceremony.
- Bhadrakali* (Bhadrakālī) □ A fearsome concept of Devi.
- Bhagavan* (Bhagavān) □ God.
- Bhadradeepapura / Bhadrapdeepa Mandapam or Deepayaga Mandapam* (Bhadraḍīpappura/ Bhadraḍīpa Maṇḍapam or Dīpayāga Maṇḍapam) □ Seperate building in this Temple where ceremonies connected with Bhadradeepam were performed.
- Bhagavatham* (Bhāgavatam) □ The great sacred Purana of Sree Veda Vyasa relating to Bhagavan Sree Krishna.
- Bhagavathar* (Bhāgavataṛ) □ Classical musician.
- Bhagyasooktham* (Bhāgyasūktam) □ A famous Vedic hymn.
- Bhagavathi* (Bhagavati) □ Goddess.
- Bhairavi* □ A classical Ragam.
- Bhaja Govindam* (Bhaja Gōvindam) □ Devotional verses by Sree Adi Sankara.
- Bhajana* (Bhajaṇa) □ Devotional songs.
- Bhajanam* (Bhajaṇam) □ A religious discipline.
- Bhakti* □ Devotion to God.
- Bhakti Manjari* (Bhakti Mañjari) □ 19th century Sanskrit devotional work by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal.
- Bhanu Vikraman* (Bhāṇu Vikramaṇ) □ A Soma Vamsha Kshatriya King.
- Bharani* (Bharaṇi) □ An asterism.
- Bharatha Muni* (Bharata Muṇi) □ Author of the authoritative work on Natya Sastram.
- Bharatanatyam* (Bharatanāṭyam) □ Classical dance of Tamil Nadu.
- Bharati* (Bhāratī) □ Term used to describe a particular composition.
- Bhargavarama* (Bhārgavarāma) □ 6th incarnation of Vishnu.
- Bhasmasura* (Bhasmāsura) □ A demon-devotee of Siva
- Bhavishyat Puranam* (Bhaviṣyat Purāṇam) □ Sacred Puranam by that name containing prophecies of the future.
- Bheeshma* (Bhīṣma) □ Son of Santanu and Ganga, grandsire of the Kuru dynasty.
- Bhikshatana Siva* (Bhikṣāṭaṇa Śiva) □ Siva begging for alms.
- Bhogamoorthy* (Bhōgamūrty) □ Dispenser of material boons.



- Bhogics* (Bhōgīs) □ Those in search of material boons.
- Bhoomi* (Bhūmi) □ Earth.
- Bhoomi Devi* (Bhūmī Dēvi) □ The Goddess Earth.
- Bhootam* (Bhūtam) □ Irascible spirit.
- Bhoota Mala* (Bhūta Māla) □ Garland of pictures of extra-terrestrials, demons included.
- Bhoothanatha* (Bhūtanātha) □ Identified as Sastha.
- Bhrigu* (Bhṛgu) □ A legendary Sage who is considered as Vishnu Bhagavan's father-in-law.
- Bhrunga Sandesam* (Bhṛṅga Sandēśam) □ 18th century Sanskrit Sandeśa Kavyam.
- Bimbam* □ Idol.
- Bindu* □ Central spot.
- Birudam* □ Title, recognition of honour.
- Brahma* □ One of the Trinity, the creator.
- Brahma Kalasam* (Brahma Kalaśam) □ Elaborate and complicated ritual involving pots of sanctified liquids.
- Brahman* □ Supreme Being.
- Brahmandam* (Brahmāṇḍam) □ Cosmos.
- Brahmanda Puranam* (Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇam) □ Sacred, mythological work.
- Brahmani* (Brahmāṇi) □ Personified female energy of Siva.
- Brahma Puranam* (Brahma Purāṇam) □ One among the eighteen sacred texts.
- Brahmi* (Brāhmi) □ An old dialect.
- Brahmin* (Brāhmin) □ Member of the highest caste in the social ladder.
- Brahma Samhita* (Brahma Samhita) □ Collection of Hindu prayers.
- Brahma Teertham* (Brahma Tīrtham) □ Sree Mithranandapuram Temple tank.
- Brahmanda Tandava Moorthy* (Brahmāṇḍa Tāṇḍava Mūṛti) □ Sree Siva in Cosmic dance.
- Brahannala* (Bṛhannaḷā) □ Arjuna, third of the Pandava brothers during the period of a curse when he was neither man nor woman.

## C

- Carnatic Music* (Kaṛṇāṭic Music) □ Orthodox classical south Indian music.
- Chakrabja Puja* (Cakṛābja Pūja) □ A complex ritualistic worship.
- Chakram* (Cakram) □ Disc of Vishnu/A certain denomination of Travancore coin.
- Chakravakam* (Cakṛavākam) □ A classical Ragam.
- Chakyar* (Cākkyār) □ Member of a temple dependant community who performs Koothu and Kootiyattom.
- Chakyar-kuttu* (Cākkyār-kūttu) □ Social satire and play-acting by Chakyars.
- Chaitanya Charitamṛitam* (Caitanya Caritāmṛitam) □ Biography of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu
- Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* (Caitanya Mahāprabhu) □ Great 15th century Bengali Saint.
- Chaitra Mahotsavam* (Caitṛa Mahōtsavam) □ Painkuni festival (March-April).
- Chakra Teertham* (Cakṛa Tīrtham) □ Holy water sources in Varkala and in Thiruvananthapuram.
- Chalayil Kalahasti* (Cālayil Kālāhasti) □ Name of a Brahmin artist responsible for a good many murals in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Champu* (Campu) □ Classical literature wherein prose and poetry are interspersed.



- Chandanam* (Candaṇam) □ Santalum album Sandalwood paste.
- Chandra* (Candra) □ Moon/Moon-God.
- Chandravalayam* (Candraṇalāyam) □ Circular percussion instrument used in the Ramakathappattu, a performing art form of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Chandra Vamsham* (Caṇḍra Vamśam) □ The Chandra Dynasty (Lunar dynasty).
- Changala* (Caṇṇāla) □ Chain.
- Chataka Sandesam* (Cātaka Saṇḍēśam) □ Manipravala Sandesha Kaavyam, 18th century.
- Chaturakshari* (Caturākṣari) □ Goddess of this Mantram (mystic incantation).
- Chathayam* (Catayam) □ An asterism.
- Chathurthi* (Caturṭhi) □ Fourth lunar day.
- Chathurbahu* (Caturbāhu) □ Four-handed One, normally used in connection with Vishu.
- Chellamvakai Karyakkar* (Cellamvakai Kāryakkār) □ Designation of the officer-in-charge of the domestic affairs of the Travancore Palace.
- Chemnavattom-attom* (Cemmāvaṭṭam-aṭṭam) □ A kind of folk-dance.
- Chempakam* (Cempakam) □ Mycheeliya Chempakam. (A flower)
- Chempakathumootu Nata* (Cempakattumūṭṭu Naṭa) □ Private entrance for royal members to this Temple.
- Chempu* (Cempu) □ Copper.
- Chenchalyam* (Cencalyam) □ Shorea Robesta, a substance used in indigenous medical preparations.
- Chengala* (Cēṇṇāla) □ Metal disc suspended from short chain and beaten with a thick stick as part of background music.
- Cheppati-vidya* (Ceppaṭi-vidya) □ Magic.
- Chera* (Cēra) □ A ruling dynasty of ancient Kerala.
- Cheraman Perumal* (Cēramāṇ Perumāḷ) □ Title for ancient rulers of Chera country.
- Cheramudi* (Cēramuḍi) □ The fabled crown of Cheras.
- Cheratta* (Ceraṭṭa) □ Coconut shell.
- Cheruchuttu* (Ceṟucuṭṭu) □ Inner enclosure surrounding the sanctum.
- Chila Kerala Charitra Prasangal* (Cila Kēraḷa Caritṛa Pṛasāṅgaḷ) □ A book by this name.
- Chilappathikaram* (Cilappatikāram) □ Classical Tamil work of the Sangam Age.
- Chingom* (Ciṇṇam) □ First month of the Malayalam year. (mid August)
- Chinmudra* (Ciṇmudra) □ Mystic symbol of the fingers.
- Chiramjeevi* (Ciramjīvi) □ One of eternal life.
- Chirappu* (Ciṟappu) □ Medium scale festival of religious nature.
- Chiravayi Mooppan* (Ciṟavāyi Mūppan) □ Title of the ruler of Venad/Travancore.
- Chitham* (Cittam) □ Mind.
- Chithira* (Cittira) □ An asterism.
- Chitra Mala* (Ciṭṛa Māla) □ Garland of pictures, representing life in its varying shades.
- Chithra Pournami* (Ciṭṛa Pauṛṇami) □ Full moon day of Chitra month.
- Chiravayi Swaroopam* (Ciṟavāyi Svarūpam) □ Venad Dynasty.
- Chola* (Cōḷa) □ A major ruling dynasty of ancient Tamil Nadu.
- Chotta* (Cōṭṭa) □ A knife with handle.
- Chukku* (Cukku) □ Dried ginger.
- Churuna* (Curuṇa) □ Cadjan scroll.



Chuttambalam (Cuṭṭambalam) □ Inner section of a temple.

Chuttu Vilakku (Cuṭṭu Viḷakku) □ Encircling lamps, offering of lighting lamps.

Chuttu Mandapam (Cuṭṭu Maṇḍapam) □ Area surrounding the sanctum.

## D

*Dahanaprayaschitham* (Dahaṇapṛāyaścittam) □ Penalty for outbreak of fire.

*Daksha* (Dakṣa) □ One of the nine Prajapatis.

*Daksha Yagam* (Dakṣa Yāgam) □ A Vedic sacrifice performed by Daksha.

*Dakshina* (Dakṣiṇa) □ Money-offering to priests.

*Dakshinamoorthy* (Dakṣiṇāmūrti) □ Siva in meditation.

*Dakshinayanam* (Dakṣiṇāyaṇam) □ The six months of the Sun's progress to the south of the Equator.

*Dalava* (Daḷava) □ Prime Minister (Dewan) of Travancore.

*Dambu* □ Ego.

*Damodara* (Dāmōdara) □ Name of Vishnu.

*Danam* (Dāṇam) □ Offering of gifts.

*Dandu* (Daṇḍu) □ Staff carried by religious orders.

*Darbha* (Daṛbha) □ A special variety of grass used commonly for religious purposes. -(Imperata Cylindrica)

*Darsanam* (Daṛśanam) □ Vision of the deity.

*Dasa* (Dāsa) □ Servant, slave.

*Dasaratha* (Daśaratha) □ A King of Ayodhya, father of Sree Rama.

*Dasathalam* (Daśatāḷam) □ A measure of length.

*Dasi* (Dāsi) □ Female attendant.

*Deepagriham* (Dīpagṛham) □ House of lamps.

*Deepalakshmi* (Dīpalakṣmi) □ Sculpted female figure with lamp.

*Deepam* (Dīpam) □ Lighted lamp.

*Deeparadhana* (Dīpārādhaṇa) □ Worship with lighted lamps.

*Deeparadhana Thattu* (Dīpārādhaṇa Taṭṭu) □ An utensil used in Deeparadhana.

*Deepa Sthambham* (Dīpa Stambham) □ Tiered lamp of considerable height.

*Deepavali* (Dīpāvali) □ National festival of lights.

*Desam* (Deśam) □ A geographical locality.

*Desami* (Deśami) □ Tenth lunar day.

*Desavathara Charitam* (Deśāvatāra Caritam) □ A Manipravala work of the 14th century.

*Desavatharam* (Deśāvatāram) □ Ten incarnations of Vishnu.

*Deshikal* (Deśīkal) □ Brahmin emigrants.

*Deva* (Dēva) □ God/Celestial.

*Devadasi* (Dēvadāsi) □ Female temple dancers.

*Devaki* (Dēvaki) □ Mother of Krishna.

*Devaprasnam* (Dēvapraśnam) □ Astrological questions and decisions relating to the Divine.

*Devaswom* (Dēvasvam) □ That which belongs to God like property, wealth etc.

*Devata* (Dēvata) □ God.



- Devatharam* (Dēvatāram) □ Cerdrios Deodara (A tree).  
*Devayani* (Dēvayāni) □ Wife of Sree Subrahmaṇya Swamy.  
*Devi* (Dēvi) □ Goddess.  
*Devi Mahatmyam* (Dēvī Māhātmyam) □ A holy text on Devi (Goddess).  
*Dewan* (Dewān) □ Prime Minister of a state of princely India.  
*Dhanu* (Dhanu) □ Fifth month of the Malayalam year. Mid December to mid January.  
*Dhanyasi* (Dhaṇyāśi) □ A classical Ragam.  
*Dharma* (Dhaṛma) □ Moral law. (This is only a rough meaning as this particular word defies translation).  
*Dharmaputra* (Dhaṛmapuṭra) □ Eldest of the five Pandava princes.  
*Dharmaraja* (Dhaṛmarāja) □ Term of honour given to Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore, 18th century.  
*Dhwajam* (Dhvajam) □ Flag.  
*Dhwaja Sthambham* (Dhvaja Stambham) □ Flagmast.  
*Dhyanam* (Dhyānam) □ Meditation.  
*Dhyanasloka* (Dhyānaslōkam) □ Meditative verse on specific form of a deity.  
*Divakara Muni* (Divākara Muṇi) □ Famed Sage connected with the consecration of this Temple.  
*Divya Prabandham, Thiruvayomzhi* (Divya Prabaṇḍam, Tiruvāymoḷi) □ Fame devotional Vaishnavite literature of the Alvars in old Tamil.  
*Dootavakyam* (Dūtavākyam) □ An Attakkatha, of Sree Swathi Thirunal.  
*Dravidian* (Dravidian) □ Of the South Indian race.  
*Dravya Kalasam* (Dravya Kalaśam) □ Pots with sanctified liquids for Abhishekam.  
*Durga* (Duṛgā) □ A form of Goddess.  
*Dvithalam* (Dvitalam) □ Two storied.  
*Dwaitham* (Dvaitam) □ Duality.  
*Dwapara Yugam* (Dvāpara Yugam) □ The third of the four Ages.  
*Dwarapalakan* (Dvārapālakan) □ Door-keeper in the Temple.  
*Dwarapalikas* (Dvārapālikās) □ Female door-keepers.

## E

- Edanazhi* (Eṭanāḷi) □ Middle-inside-temple-corridor.  
*Edavom* (Iṭavam) □ 10th month of the Malayalam year mid May to mid June.  
*Edayil Madhom* (Iṭayil Madhom) □ One of the four hermitages in Thrissur.  
*Eesana Gurudeva Padhati* (Īśāṇa Gurudēva Padhati). □ A Tantric work on Saivism by Isana Gurudeva, 12th century.  
*Ekadesi* (Ēkādaśi) □ 11th lunar day.  
*Ekaksharakosam* (Ēkākṣarakōśam) □ Sanskrit dictionary giving the meaning of each Sanskrit syllable.  
*Ekasila Mandapam* (Ēkaśila Maṇḍapam) □ Single rock platform. (Ottakkal Mandapam of Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple)  
*Elanji* (Elaññi) □ Mimsot (A tree).  
*Elayaraja* (Eḷayarāja) □ The next in line to the Throne.  
*Elaya Thampuran* (Eḷaya Tampurān) □ Junior Prince or Princess.



*Embran* (Embrāṇ) □ Tulu Brahmin.

*Enna* (Eṇṇa) □ Oil.

*Enna-pura* (Eṇṇa-pura) □ Oil room.

*Erattakulavazha Chirappu* (Eraṭṭakulavāḷa Ciṟappu) □ Festival involving plantain stem and plantain bunches decorations which is double the normal number.

*Etakka* (Eṭakka) □ A percussion instrument.

*Ettara Yogam* (EṭṭaraYōgam) □ Council of Eight and a Half, administrative body of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple

*Ethirtu Puja* (Etiṟtu Pūja) □ Worship to welcome the day.

*Ettuvecttil Pillamar* (Eṭṭuvēṭṭil Piḷḷamār) □ The Nair lords of the Eight Houses.

*Ezharapponnana* (Ēḷarapponṇāṇa) □ Seven and a half golden elephants- seven big and one small in size.

*Ezhava* (Īḷava) □ A Hindu community of Kerala falling under the classification 'backward'.

*Ezhunnallathu* (Eḷunnaḷḷattu) □ Procession of Deities or royalty.

*Ezhuthani* (Eḷuttāṇi) □ Sharp needle-edged metallic instrument used to write on palm leaves.

## G

*Gajalakshmi* (Gaja Lakṣmi) □ Goddess Lakshmi flanked by two elephants.

*Gajendra-moksham* (Gajēndra-mōkṣam) □ Salvation of the Elephant-king.

*Ganapathy/Ganesha* (Gaṇapati) □ Elephant-faced God.

*Ganapathy Homam* (Gaṇapati Hōmam) □ Fire sacrifice to propitiate Ganapathy.

*Gandham* □ Smell.

*Garbha Griham* (Gaṛbha Gṛham) □ Sanctum Sanctorum.

*Garbhasreeman* (Gaṛbhaśṛīmān) □ King even while in the womb.

*Garuda* (Garuḍa) □ A legendary eagle, vehicle of Vishnu.

*Garuda Deepam* (Garuḍa Dīpam) □ Garuda-bird lamp.

*Garuda Vahanam* (Garuḍa Vāhaṇam) □ Garuda Conveyance.

*Garuda-vidya* (Garuḍa-vidya) □ Impersonation of Garuda.

*Garva-kettu* (Gaṛva-keṭṭu) □ Penalty imposed by Ettara Yogam on the ruling family.

*Gayatri* (Gāyatrī) □ A verse of the Rigvedam of great sanctity addressed to the Sun-god as Savite.

*Geetha Thrishtuppu* (Gīta Triṣṭuppu) □ A holy Mantram.

*Ghattiyam* (Ghaṭṭiyam) □ Composition in praise of the Lord to be recited at specified times, here composed by Sree Swathi Thirunal.

*Golavistharakhyanam* (Gōḷavistarākhyāṇam) □ Part of Brahmanda Puranam.

*Gopalan* (Gōpālan) □ Cowherd boy; a name of Krishna.

*Gopastree Vastrakshepam* (Gōpastṛī Vastrākṣēpam) □ Hiding the apparel of the Gopies.

*Gopis* (Gōpīs) □ Cowherd damsels.

*Gorochanam* (Gōrōcaṇam) □ A bright yellow substance.

*Gopuram* (Gōpuram) □ Tower.

*Goshala* (Gōśāla) □ Cowshed.

*Gosahasra Danam* (Gōsahasṛa Dāṇam) □ Gift of thousand cows.

*Govardhanam* (Gōvaṛḍhaṇam) □ A mountain famous in the childhood tales of Sree Krishna.



*Govinda* (Gōvinda) □ Synonym of Vishnu.

*Grantha* □ Text, an ancient language.

*Grantha-pura* □ Record room.

*Granthavari* (Granthavari) □ Chronicles recorded and preserved in temples.

*Grihasthasrama* (Gṛhastāśrama) □ State of married life.

*Gulgulu* □ Commiphora Mukul, Comniphra (Balsamodendron mukul), a compound.

*Gunas* (Guṇās) □ Qualities.

*Guruparampara Prabhavam* (Guruparampara Prabhāvam) □ A Sanskrit work written around the Tenth century, considered an ongoing work.

## H

*Hamsa* □ Swan.

*Hamsa Sandesam* (Hamsa Sandēśam) □ A Sandesa Kavyam in Sanskrit.

*Hanuman* (Haṇumān) □ Name of a monkey chief, a great devotee of Sree Rama Swamy.

*Hanuman-vidya* (Haṇumān-vidya) □ Performing with Hanuman mask.

*Harikathakalakshepa* (Harikathākālākṣēpa) □ Singsong rendering of the story of Hari (Vishnu).

*Harischandra* (Hariścandra) □ King of the Solar dynasty who was famed for upholding truth.

*Hari Vamsham* (Hari Vamśam) □ Supplementary to the Mahabharatham epic.

*Hata Yogam* (Haṭa Yōgam) □ An Yogic discipline.

*Hayagreeva* (Hayagrīva) □ Horse-faced manifestation of Vishnu.

*Hiranyagarbham* (Hiraṇyagarbham) □ A royal offering of lavish proportions.

*Hiranyakasipu* (Hiraṇyakaśipu) □ Demon king, slain by Vishnu.

*Homam* (Hōmam) □ Vedic oblation with fire.

*Homa Kundam* (Hōma Kuṇḍam) □ Pit where Homam is performed.

*Homappura* (Hōmappura) □ Place earmarked for conduct of certain Vedic rituals.

*Hridaya Kamalam* (Hṛdaya Kamalam) □ Heart imagined as a lotus.

*Hundi* (Huṇḍi) □ Collection box.

## I

*Ida* (Īḍa) □ A vital nerve.

*Idichupizhinja Payasam* (Īṭiccupiḷiñña Pāyasam) □ A type of sweet liquid preparation, coconut milk and jaggery being prominent constituents.

*Ikkara* □ Inner bank of a river.

*Illom* □ Namboodiri homestead.

*Iluppa tree* □ Indian Butter Tree (Bassia Longfolia).

*Indra* □ Chief of the celestials or Devas.

*Indrajit* □ Son of the demon King Ravana.

*Indra Vahanam* (Indra Vāhanam) □ Gopuram type vehicle used on the sixth day of Utsavam in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

*Isa* (Īśa) □ Siva, Lord.

*Ista* (Iṣṭa) □ Of personal choice.



*Ista Devata* (Iṣṭa Dēvata) □ Deity of personal choice.

*Ithi* (Itti) □ *Ficus Gibbosa* (A tree).

*Ilankovadikal* (Iḷaṅkōvaḍikaḷ) □ Pandyan Prince, brother of Chera Chenkuttuvan, author of *Chilappathikaram*.

## J

*Jagadguru* □ World Preceptor.

*Jalajapam* □ Prayer by Namboodiries standing knee deep in water, an important feature of the *Murajapam* at the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

*Jalam* □ Water.

*Jambookam* (Jambūkam) □ Fox.

*Jangala Desam* (Jaṅgaḷa Dēśam) □ Barren land.

*Janninmel-dandippu* (Ñāṇinmēl-daṇḍippu) □ Tight rope acrobatics (Arangam).

*Japam* □ Prayers.

*Jayan* □ Dwarapalakan of Sree Maha Vishnu.

*Jayadevan* (Jayadēvaṇ) □ Famous Bengali poet who authored *Gita Govindam*.

*Jayanthi* (Jayanti) □ Birthday of a God (or saint).

*Javanthi* (Javanti) □ *Chrysanthemum* (A flower).

*Jeevatmas* (Jīvātmās) □ Individual souls.

*Jihva* □ Tongue.

*Jeeva Dandam* (Jīva Dantam) □ Live ivory.

*Jwala* (Jvāla) □ Flame.

*Jeeva Jalam* (Jīva Jalam) □ Lifewater.

## K

*Kadali* (Kadaḷi) □ A variety of plantain.

*Kaimani* (Kaimaṇi) □ Cymbals.

*Kaimukku Satyam* □ Ordeal for detection of crime, now obsolete.

*Kaivatta* (Kaivaṭṭa) □ Bronze utensil with a long handle to carry oil used for special rites.

*Kaivistaram* (Kaivistāram) □ Magic by trick of hand (Arangam).

*Kakka-oottu* (Kākka-ūṭṭu) □ Crow-feeding.

*Kalabham* (Kaḷabham) □ Sandal in semi liquid or more solid consistency, a Vedic ritual.

*Kalabhabhishekam* (Kaḷabhābhiṣēkam) □ Oblation with sandal.

*Kalabha Kalasam* (Kaḷabha Kalaśam) □ Complex Vedic ritual involving sanctified sandal in pots.

*Kalachakram* (Kālacakṛam) □ Disc of Time.

*Kalakoothu* (Kāḷakkūṭṭu) □ Bullfight (Arangam).

*Kalasam* (Kalaśam) □ Significant Vedic ritual involving sanctified liquids in pots.

*Kalasa Puja* (Kalaśa Pūja) □ Ritualistic worship conducted to the Kalasa pots.

*Kali* (Kālī) □ Fierce form of Goddess Parvathi.

*Kalidasa* (Kāḷidāsa) □ Great Sanskrit poet of enduring fame.



- Kalindi* (Kālīndi) □ Famed river in Vrindavanam.
- Kaliyamardanam* (Kālīyamaṛḍanam) □ Subduing of Kaliyan.
- Kaliyan* (Kālīyan) □ Serpent chief featuring in the Bhagavatha Puranam.
- Kaliyil Adi* (Kālīyil Aṭi) □ Mock fight (Arangam).
- Kali Yugam* □ 4th and last of the Ages.
- Kalpavriksham* (Kalpavṛkṣam) □ Tree of boons situated in Heaven.
- Kallu* □ Stone.
- Kalyanam* (Kalyāṇam) □ Wedding, prosperity.
- Kalyani* (Kalyāṇi) □ A classical Ragam.
- Kama Deva* (Kāma Dēva) □ The God of love.
- Kamadhenu Tantra* (Kāmadhēnu Tantra) □ A book on Tantram.
- Kamala Vahanam* (Kamala Vāhaṇam) □ Lotus Vehicle.
- Kama* (Kāma) □ Lust.
- Kamas* (Kamās) □ A Rāgam.
- Kambadavu* (Kambaṭavu) □ Defence with sticks (Arangam).
- Kamba Ramayanam* (Kamba Rāmāyaṇam) □ Ramayanam authored by Kambar the famous Tamil Poet.
- Kamboji* (Kāmbōji) □ A classical Ragam.
- Kamsa* □ Demonic king, uncle of Sree Krishna.
- Kandam* (Kāṇḍam) □ Section (of book).
- Kanakkambu-aivu* (Kaṇakkambu-aivu) □ A Display of aim by stick throwing. (Arangam).
- Kani* (Kaṇi) □ Arrangement of auspicious items to be first seen on Vishu morning.
- Kanikka* (Kāṇikka) □ Offering of money.
- Kanian* (Kaṇiyān) □ A Hindu caste involved in astrology.
- Kannada* (Kaṇṇaḍa) □ A classical Ragam.
- Kanni* (Kaṇṇi) □ Second month of Malayalam year.
- Kanni-konu* (Kaṇṇi-kōṇu) □ South west corner.
- Kanni-moola* (Kaṇṇi-mūla) □ South west corner.
- Kandalloor Salai* (Kāntaḷlūr Śālai) □ Far-famed institution of martial arts located in Thiruvananthapuram
- Kapalikas* (Kāpālikas) □ A barbaric tribe.
- Kappiyathu Kappiyanar* (Kappiyatu Kāppiyanār) □ One of the authors of the Patittu Pathu a Tamil work of vintage.
- Kapplingadu School* (Kapḷiṇṇāḍu School) □ Thekkan or Southern School of Kathakali.
- Karakam* □ A special type of vessal.
- Karana-chattam* (Karaṇa-cāṭṭam) □ Somersault (Arangam).
- Karanakkanakkan* (Karaṇakkaṇakkan) □ Record writer of this Temple, a hereditary post.
- Karanamai right* (Karanāmai right) □ Right to cultivation, partial ownership.
- Karanama Sambandham* (Karanāma Sambandham) □ Right to use of place and name gained via adoption.
- Karanatta Kurup* (Karaṇatta Kuṟup) □ Member of the Ettara Yogam.
- Karikku* □ Tender coconut.
- Karikku Mandapam* (Kariṅku Maṇḍapam) □ Platform enroute Shankhumughom beach where tender coconuts are offered to the Deities during Arat procession.



- Karinjali* (Kariññāli) □ Acocial Catechu (A tree).
- Karkatakam* (Karkkaṭakam) □ 12th and the last month of the Malayalam year.
- Karkataka Siveli* (Karkkaṭaka Śīvēli) □ Mid July solstice Siveli.
- Karmi* (Kaṛmi) □ One who performs rituals.
- Karnan* (Kaṛṇan) □ Son of Kunti, born of the Sun-god.
- Karpooram* (Karpūram) □ Camphor.
- Karthaveeryarjunan* (Kāṛtavīryārjunan) □ A famous Kshatriya King.
- Karthika* (Kāṛtika) □ An asterism.
- Karutheedapathu Chomathiri* (Karuttiḍappāṭu Cōmātiri) □ Distinguished member of Sree Karthika Thirunal Dharmaraja's court.
- Karuvelamkulam Puja* (Karuvelamkuḷam Pūja) □ Commemorates Prince Ravi Varma's victory over Rettiyapuram Zamindar's invading force at Karuvelamkulam.
- Kasavu* (Kaśavu) □ Memecylon Edule (A tree).
- Kashayam* (Kaśāyam) □ Medicinal decoction.
- Kasturi* (Kastūri) □ Musk.
- Ḳasu* (Kāśu) □ Travancore coin, smallest minted legal tender currency in the world.
- Katcha* (Kacca) □ Cloth.
- Kathakali* (Kathakalī) □ An art form specific to Kerala. (Ref:Attakkatha).
- Katukka* (Kaṭukka) □ Tirmerialia Chebula, a substance used in Ayurvedam.
- Katu-Sarkara-Yogam* (Kaṭu-Śarkara-Yōgam) □ Rare composition used in the making of idols.
- Kauravas* □ 101 children of King Dhru tarashtra.
- Kavara Vilakku* (Kavara Viḷakku) □ Many branched bronze lamp.
- Kaveri* (Kāvēri) □ A sacred river in South India.
- Kavi* (Kāvi) □ Red ochre.
- Kavirayanmar* (Kavirāyanmār) □ Assembly of poets (Arangam).
- Kavyam* (Kāvyaṃ) □ Poetry.
- Kavya Grandham* (Kāvya Grantham) □ Book of Verses.
- Keezhedams* (Kīḷēḍams) □ Subsidiary temples.
- Kedaragaulam* (Kēdāragaulam) □ A classical Ragam.
- Keralachara Deepika* (Kēraḷācāra Dīpika) □ Believed by some to have been authored by Vilvamangalam.
- Keralabhoobhrit* (Kēraḷabhūbhṛt) □ Title of King of Ist Chera Empire.
- Kerala Desam and Tantram* (Kēraḷa Dēśam and Tanṭram) □ Book on the land of Kerala and Tantram.
- Kerala Mahatmyam* (Kēraḷa Māhātmyam) □ Title of a book on greatness of Kerala.
- Keralaputhras* (Kēraḷaputrās) □ Title of ancient Travancore Kings.
- Kerala Varma Ramayanam* (Kēraḷa Varma Rāmāyaṇam) □ 17th century Malayalam translation of Valmiki Ramayanam by Kottayam Kerala Varma.
- Kerala Visesh Niyamam* (Kēraḷa Viśēṣa Niyamam) □ A book by Pachu Moothathu dealing with the special codes of Kerala worship.
- Kesava* (Kēśava) □ Synonym of Vishnu.
- Kezhavan Raja* (Kiḷavan Rāja) □ Dharmaraja, Sree Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma.
- Kilikkinnam* (Kiḷikkinnam) □ Noon repast of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.
- Kindi* (Kiñṭi) □ Typical Kerala vessel with a long spout (pitcher).



- Kiratam-attom* (Kirātam-āṭṭam) □ Hunter's dance (Arangam).
- Kiratan* (Kirātan) □ Siva as a hunter.
- Kiratharjuneeyam* (Kirātārjunīyam) □ Mahakavya in Sanskrit written by Bharavi of the 7th century AD.
- Kiritapathy* (Kiriṭapati) □ Title of Sovereignty.
- Koil Adhikarikal* (Kōil Adhikārikal) □ Title of Rama Varma Kulasekhara, last in the line of the IInd Chera Empire. The term in literal translation means one who is in command of the temples.
- Kolarakku* (Kōlarakku) □ Lac, a sticky compound.
- Kola Swaroopam* (Kōla Svarūpam) □ Dynasty of Kola rulers from Chirakkal in North Kerala.
- Kolattom* (Kōlāṭṭam) □ A folk dance accompanied by beating time on wooden sticks.
- Kolezhuthu* (Kōleḷuttu) □ Type of Malayalam script in use till start of 16th century (mainly in the northern areas).
- Kollam* □ Year (Also name of a city in Travancore State) Desinganad
- Kollam Era* □ Malayalam Era.I (beginning with 825 AD)
- Kolu Vilakku* (Kōlu Viḷakku) □ Lamp suspended from rod on iron hook.
- Kombu* □ Long piped musical instrument / horn
- Koppara* (Koppaṛa) □ Large vessel.
- Koppu* (Kōppu) □ Commodities, accessories.
- Koppu-pura* (Kōppu-pura) □ Room where accessories are stored.
- Koormam* (Kūrṁmam) □ 3rd incarnation of Vishnu as tortoise.
- Koodi-attom* (Kūṭi-āṭṭam) □ Entertainment of special nature by Chakyar community (Arangam).
- Koothambalam* (Kūttambalam) □ Special hall for performing Chakyarkoothu.
- Koovala-kayu* (Kūvaḷa-kāyu) □ Fruit of Aegla Marmelos.
- Koshtha Devata* (Kōṣṭha Dēvata) □ Bracket figure.
- Koti Archana* (Kōṭi Arcana) □ Worship with a Mantram repeated a crore times.
- Koti* (Kōṭi) □ Flag.
- Kotiettu* (Kōṭiēṭṭu) □ Flag hoisting.
- Kottakkakam* (Kōṭṭakkakam) □ Inside the Fort.
- Kottam* (Kōṭṭam) □ Sassurea Lappa, a compound.
- Koyal* (Kōyal) □ Sweet throated Indian black bird.
- Kozhipparal* (Kōḷipparal) □ A special stone powdered to sand.
- Krishna* (Kṛṣṇa) □ 9th incarnation of Vishnu.
- Krishnanattom* (Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam) □ Stories of Krishna in dance style (Arangam).
- Krishnapparunthu* (Kṛṣṇapparuntu) □ Kite.
- Krishna Puja* (Kṛṣṇa Pūja) □ Ritualistic worship for Sree Krishna.
- Krita Yugam* (Kṛta Yugam) □ Ist of the four Ages.
- Kriya* □ Rituals.
- Krodha* (Krōdha) □ Anger.
- Kshatriya* (Kṣatriya) □ The ruling caste, Second in the social ladder.
- Ksheram* (Kṣaram) □ That which is destructible, finite.
- Kshetra Chitanya Rahasyam* (Kṣētra Caitanya Rahasyam) □ Authoritative work on the secret spiritual effulgence in temples by Madhavji.
- Kshetrakaryam Potti* (Kṣētrakāryam Pōṭṭi) □ Potti member of the Ettara Yogam who has special duties.



- Kshetrapalan* (Kṣētrapālan) □ Guardian deity of a Temple.
- Kshetrapravesana Vilambaram* (Kṣētrapravēṣaṇa Viḷambaram) □ Temple Entry Proclamation.
- Kshetra Sanyasi* (Kṣētra Sanyāsi) □ Ascetic residing within the Temple.
- Kuchela-attom* (Kucēla-āṭṭam) □ Enactment of Kuchela's tale (Arangam).
- Kuchela* (Kucēla) □ Lord Krishna's friend and classmate who was a poor Brahmin devotee.
- Kuhu* □ A nerve centre.
- Kula* □ Banana bunch.
- Kulam* (Kuḷam) □ Pond.
- Kula Devata* (Kula Dēvata) □ Dynastic deity.
- Kulasekhara Mandapam* (Kulaśēkhara Maṇḍapam) □ Famous hall of sculptural work of the Sree Padmanabha Temple.
- Kulasekhara Perumal* (Kulaśēkhara Perumāḷ) □ Title of honour of Kings of Venad / Travancore.
- Kulavazha* (Kulavāḷa) □ Plantain stem with banana bunch.
- Kulavazha Chirappu* (Kulavāḷa Cīrappu) □ Offering of Kulavazhas.
- Kumbhabhishekam* (Kumbhābhiṣēkam) □ Elaborate rites on repair, restructure of Vimanam or roof of the Sreekovil.
- Kumbhakarnan* (Kumbhakaṇṇan) □ Younger brother of Ravana.
- Kumbham* □ 7th month of the Malayalam year.
- Kumkumam* (Kuṇkumam) □ Composite powder of red colour.
- Kumbha Deepam* (Kumbha Dīpam) □ Lamp fashioned like a round pot.
- Kundalam* (Kuṇḍalam) □ Ear drops.
- Kundalini* (Kuṇḍaliṇi) □ Serpentine power; Vital force
- Kundirikkam* (Kuntirikkam) □ Boswellia Serrata (A sweet-smelling, multipurpose compound).
- Kunjan Nambiar* (Kuṇṇan Nambiār) □ A famous Malayalam poet who excelled in satire.
- Kuntham Payattu* (Kuntam Payaṭṭu) □ Spear fight (Arangam).
- Kunthi* (Kunti) □ Mother of the Pandavas.
- Kurali-vidya* (Kuraḷi-vidya) □ An Arangam.
- Kurukshetram* (Kurukṣēṭṭram) □ The place where the great Mahabharatha War was fought.
- Kurumkuzhal* (Kuṇṇukuḷal) □ Special short-piped Nagaswaram.
- Kuta* (Kuṭa) □ Umbrella.
- Kutaettam* (Kuṭaēṭṭam) □ Ceremony of assumption of office by the Nambies.
- Kutam* (Kuṭam) □ Pot.
- Kuthirakettu* (Kutirakkeṭṭu) □ Huge, decorated artificial horses. (Arangam)
- Kutumba Devata* (Kuṭumba Dēvatā) □ Family deity.

## L

- Lakshadeepam* (Lakṣadīpam) □ Fabulous festival of a lakh of lamps.
- Lakshmana* (Lakṣmaṇa) □ Younger brother of Rama.
- Lakshmi Devi* (Lakṣmī Dēvi) □ Goddess of Prosperity, wife of Sree Maha Vishnu.
- Lanka Lakshmi* (Laṅkā Lakṣmī) □ Name of the female guard of Lanka city.
- Lasyam* (Lāsyam) □ Indicative of mood of romance.
- Leelas* (Līlās) □ Sport, past time.



*Leelathilakam* (Līlātilakam) □ First work in grammar and rhetoric on Manipravalam of the late 14th century.

*Lobham* (Lōbham) □ Covetousness, stinginess.



*Madam* □ Passion.

*Madappally* (Maṭappally) □ Kitchen.

*Maddalam* (Maddalam) □ A percussion instrument.

*Madhavan* (Mādhavan) □ Another name of God Vishnu.

*Madhom* (Matham) □ Hermitage, monastery.

*Madhyamam* □ Middle, comparative.

*Mahabali* (Mahābali) □ A demon king relating to Vamana Avataram.

*Mahabharathakonu* (Mahābhārata-koṇu) □ A specially demarcated area in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

*Mahabharatha Pattu* (Mahābhārata Pāṭṭu) □ Folk style representation of Mahabharatham.

*Mahabharatham* (Mahābhāratham) □ Great sacred epic of Bhagavan Sree Krishna's time by sage Veda Vyāsa.

*Mahabhishekam* (Mahābhiṣēkam) □ Oblation with highly sanctified liquid medium.

*Mahadanas* (Mahādāṇas) □ Great gifts.

*Maha Gayatri* (Mahā Gāyatrī) □ The Gayatri Mahamantram.

*Mahakavyam* (Mahākāvyaṃ) □ Lengthy poetic work.

*Maha Kshetram* (Mahā Kṣētram) □ Great temple.

*Mahalahshmi* (Mahālakṣmi) □ Consort of Maha Vishnu.

*Maha Meru Chakram* (Maha Mēru Caṅṅam) □ Tantric raised diagrammatic representation of Devi.

*Maha Mrithyunjaya Homam* (Mahā Mrityuñjaya Hōmam) □ A significant Vedic ritual involving fire to propitiate Sree Parameswara to aid long life by warding off death.

*Maharaja* (Mahārāja) □ Great king.

*Maharshi* (Maharṣi) □ Sage.

*Mahatmyam* (Māhātmyam) □ Greatness.

*Maha Vishnu* (Mahā Viṣṇu) □ One of the Trinity in whom rests the responsibility of preservation.

*Maha Vishnu Panchakshari* (Mahā Viṣṇu Pañcākṣari) □ Five syllabled holy Mantram of Vishnu.

*Makaram* □ 6th month of the Malayalam year.

*Makara Matsyam* □ A kind of sea monster.

*Maharani* (Mahārāṇi) □ Queen.

*Makara Sivali* (Makara Śivēli) □ Sivali conducted on the mid January solstice.

*Malayalam* (Malayāḷam) □ The local language of the State of Kerala.

*Malika* (Mālīka) □ Double or multi-storied structure.

*Mamankom* (Māmāṅkam) □ Grand festival of 28 days held once in 12 years at Thirunavaya to establish the Zamorin's supremacy.

*Mana* (Maṇa) □ House of a Namboodiri.

*Mandapam* (Maṇḍapam) □ Platform.



- Mandara mountain* □ A legendary mountain.
- Mandira Moorthies* (Mandira Mūrtis) □ Temple deities.
- Mangala-vadyas* (Maṅgaḷa-vādyas) □ Auspicious instrumental music
- Manga-pura* (Māṇṇā-pura) □ Room for storing mangoes.
- Mani* (Maṇi) □ Clock.
- Manikantham* (Maṇikaṇṭham) □ A symbol of royalty.
- Manipravalam* (Maṇipravāḷam) □ Literary style of writing using a combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit.
- Manipura Chakram* (Maṇipūra Cakṛam) □ One of the six power centres of the spinal cord.
- Manmathan* □ God of Love.
- Manomayakosam* (Maṇōmayakōśam) □ Third of the five physical demarcations of a temple/ The orbit comprising the mind of man.
- Mannuncer Koral* (Maṇṇuṇīr Kōral) □ A ritual preceding Mulayital before Utsavam.
- Manorama Thampuratty* (Maṇōrama Tampurāṭṭi) □ Well known literary figure from the Zamorin's family.
- Mantram* (Maṇṭram) □ Sacred incantation.
- Mantropadesam* (Maṇṭrōpadēśam) □ Imparting a sacred Mantram (prayer) to disciple.
- Mardanam* (Maṛḍaṇam) □ Physical harassment.
- Markandeyan* (Mārkaṇḍēyan) □ Great Siva devotee blessed with eternal life (Son of Sage Mrikandu).
- Marmam* (Maṛmam) □ Vital point of the body.
- Maruthu* (Marutu) □ Terminalia Paniculata (A tree).
- Mathilakam* (Matilakam) □ That which is within the walls, another term for Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Mathilakam Pattu* (Matilakam Pāṭṭu) □ Post Marthanda Varma ballad in Malayalam.
- Mathrakol-kali* (Mātrakōḷi-kāḷi) □ Group folk dance of Gujarat
- Mathsaryam* (Mātsaryam) □ Competition.
- Matsyam* □ Fish.
- Maya* (Māya) □ Causative factor of the universe lending to illusion. (This meaning is a rough translation).
- Mayura Sandesam* (Mayūra Sandēśam) □ Late 14th century Sanskrit work (Sandeshakavyam) of particular character.
- Matsya Rekha* (Matsya Rēkha) □ Line resembling a fish
- Matsya Puranam* (Matsya Purāṇam) □ Sacred text by that name
- Medom* (Mēṭam) □ Corresponds to Malayalam month April-May.
- Meenom* (Mīnam) □ 8th month of the Malayalam year.
- Melkanganom* (Mēlkaṅgāṇam) □ Temple accountant.
- Melkkettu* (Mēlkkēṭṭu) □ Cloth canopy.
- Meni Thulappayasam* (Mēṇi Tulāppāyasam) □ Exotic food offering of jaggery, rice, ghee and so on.
- Meru Goswamy* (Mēru Gōswāmy) □ Pioneer exponent of Harikatha Kalakshepam in Kerala.
- Methan* (Mēttan) □ Local expression for Muslim.
- Mithunam* (Mithuṇam) □ 11th month of the Malayalam year.
- Mizhavu* (Miḷāvu) □ A type of drum in copper covered with leather used in Koothu and Koodiyattom.



- Moham* (Mōham) □ Desire.
- Mohini* (Mōhini) □ Enchantress.
- Mohini-attom* (Mōhini-āṭṭam) □ Langurous dance style originally of Devadasies.
- Mokshasthanam* (Mōkṣasthānam) □ Place of salvation/liberation.
- Mopla* (Mōpḷa) □ Muslim.
- Moolam* (Mūlam) □ An asterism.
- Moola Mantram* (Mūla Manṭram) □ Fundamental Mantram.
- Moola Vighram* (Mūla Vighram) □ Main consecrated idol.
- Mooppam/Mootha* (Mūppan/Mūṭṭa) □ Indicative of seniority.
- Mooppil* (Mūppil) □ Senior (old).
- Moorthy* (Mūrti) □ God.
- Mootha Panikkar Thottathu Ashari* (Mūṭṭa Paṇikkar Tōṭṭaṭṭū Āśāri) □ Famed sculptor of the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.
- Moothashari* (Mūṭṭāśāri) □ Master craftsman.
- Mootha Thampuram* (Mūṭṭa Tampurān) □ Seniomost prince or princess, normally king, queen or head of a clan or joint family.
- Moti-vidya* (Mōṭi-vidya) □ Fancy dress or costume display.
- Mridangam* (Mṛdaṅgam) □ A percussion instrument like a drum.
- Mriga-mala* (Mṛga-māla) □ Picture garland of animals.
- Mudra* (Mudra) □ Symbol.
- Mukha Mandapam* (Mukha Maṇḍapam) □ Front platform connected to the outer area of the sanctum.
- Mukhappu* □ Portico.
- Mukhari* (Mukhāri) □ A classical Ragam.
- Mukilan* □ Name of a Muslim adventurer.
- Mukta Jeevatma* (Mukta Jīvātma) □ Released or liberated soul.
- Mula dravyas* (Muḷadravyas) □ Seeds to be sprouted.
- Mulayital* (Muḷayital) □ Ritual preceding the temple Utsavas (puting the seeds to the sprouted).
- Mulappalika* (Muḷappālika) □ Container in which grains are sown to be sprouted.
- Mulappura* (Muḷappura) □ Room where grains to be sprouted are stored.
- Mula Puja* (Muḷa Pūja) □ Ritual before the commencement of festival.
- Mulla* □ *Jasminum Sambac* (a flower).
- Mullamoottu Bhagavathar* (Mullamūṭṭu Bhāgavatars) □ Designation of the Travancore court musicians.
- Mura Siveli* (Muṛa Śivēli) □ Siveli in cyclic rotation.
- Muni* (Muṇi) □ Sage.
- Mundu* (Muṇḍu) □ Cloth.
- Mura* (Muṛa) □ Turn.
- Murajapam* (Muṛajapam) □ Prayer in cyclic rotation, a fetival falling once in six years in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Murugan* □ Another name for Lord Subramaniya.
- Muzhukappu* (Muḷukkāppu) □ Offering wherein butter or sandal paste is coated on the Deity and features introduced.





*Nabhi* (Nābhi) □ Navel.

*Nabhijanmam* (Nābhijanmam) □ Birth from the naval (referring to Brahma who is presented sitting in a lotus rising from the naval of Sree Padmanabha Swamy).

*Nada Brahman* (Nāda Brahman) □ Pranavam.

*Nadam* (Nādam) □ Resonance.

*Nadi* (Nāḍi) □ Nerve.

*Nadi Bandhanam* (Nāḍi Bandhaṇam) □ Amalgamating process.

*Naduvil* (Naṭuvil) □ Central.

*Naduvil Madhom* (Naṭuvil Maṭham) □ One of the four Namboodiri hermitage in Thrissur.

*Nagam* (Nāgam) □ Snake, serpent

*Naga Deepam* (Nāga Dīpam) □ Snake lamp.

*Nagaraja* (Nāgarāja) □ King of snakes, serpents.

*Nagarkavu* (Nāgarkāvu) □ Serpent-shrine.

*Nagastram* (Nāgāstram) □ Arrow with serpent power.

*Nagaswaram* (Nāgasvaram) □ Long piped musical instrument.

*Nair* (Nāyar) □ An upper caste without the holy thread.

*Nakshatram* (Nakṣatram) □ Asterism.

*Nalacharitam* (Naḷacaritam) □ Famed Kathakali drama based on the story of King Nalan.

*Nalambalam* (Nālambalam) □ Inner demarcated area of a temple.

*Nalam Kalasam* (Nālām Kalaśam) □ 4th day Kalasam rites.

*Nali* (Nāli) □ A cubic measurement.

*Nalpamaram* (Nālpāmaram) □ Decoction made out of the bark of four fig trees, Athi, Ithi, Arayalu and Peralu.

*Namam* (Nāmam) □ Caste mark.

*Namaskaram* (Namaskāram) □ Prostration, sanctified food offering for Brahmins.

*Namaskara Mandapam* (Namaskāra Maṇḍapam) □ The detached facing platform of a sanctum sanctorum.

*Nambi* □ Chief priest.

*Nambi Madhom* (Nambi Maṭham) □ Residence of chief priests.

*Nambiars* (Nambiārs) □ Ambalavasies without the holy thread.

*Namboodiri* (Nambūtiri) □ Kerala Brahmin, highest caste.

*Namboodiripad* (Nambūtiripāḍ) □ Namboodiri of high status.

*Nammalvar* (Nammālvār) □ 12th and the most reputed of the Alvar saints.

*Nanatantrasastram* (Nāṇātantraśāstraṁ) □ A book on Tantram by that name.

*Nandagopan* (Nandagōpan) □ Foster father of Sree Krishna.

*Nandavanam* (Nandāvaṇam) □ Flower garden of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

*Nandi/Nandikeswara* (Nandi/Nandikēśvara) □ Nandi the bull, Lord Siva's vehicle.

*Nandiyarvattam* (Nantiyārvaṭṭam) □ Tabernacle Montana - (a flower).

*Nangyar* (Nañyār) □ Lady of the Chakyar community.

*Narada* (Nārada) □ A great celestial Sage finding a place in most Puranas, prime devotee of



- Naradeeyam* (Nārādīyam) □ A system of ritualistic worship.
- Narasimha* □ 4th incarnation of Vishnu.
- Narayana* (Nārāyaṇa) □ Vishnu.
- Narayana Kavacham* (Nārāyaṇa Kavacam) □ A potent prayer of Vishnu.
- Narayana Sthals* (Nārāyaṇasthals) □ Famed centres of Narayana.
- Narayaneeyam* (Nārāyaṇīyam) □ Famous devotional work of thousand odd stanzas dedicated to Bhagavan Sree Guruvayoorappan by Sree Narayanathu Battathiri.
- Narayam* (Nārāyam) □ Sharp pointed needle-like object serving as pen.
- Nata* (Naṭa) □ Entrance, door way
- Natakashala* (Nāṭakaśāla) □ Place where performing arts take the stage.
- Natakashala Mukhappu* (Nāṭakaśāla Mukhappu) □ A place where performance of dance, music and other art forms, rendering of scriptures, scholarly discussions etc. took the stage in this Temple.
- Natakashala-vidvans* (Nāṭakaśāla-vidvāṇs) □ Assembly of scholars of the Natakashala.
- Nataraja* (Naṭarāja) □ Dancing Siva.
- Nattakkurunji* (Nāṭṭakkuruṇṇi) □ A Ragam.
- Natvanmar* (Naṭvanmār) □ Masters of classical dance.
- Natyasastram* (Nāṭyaśāstram) □ Treatise on the art of dance by Bharata Muni.
- Navagrahas* (Navagrahās) □ Nine planets.
- Navakam* □ Kalasam with nine pots.
- Navami* □ 9th lunar day.
- Navarathri* (Navarātri) □ Nine day festival honouring the Devi.
- Navaretnas* (Navaretnās) □ Nine specific gems.
- Naveekarana Kalasam* (Navīkaraṇa Kalaśam) □ Purificatory rites relating to renovation of a temple.
- Nayanars* (Nayanars) □ Famed Saivite saints, 63 in number.
- Nayik style* (Nāyik style) □ Style of Tamil architecture of the Nayik cheftans of Tamil Nadu.
- Nazar* □ Symbol of vassalage.
- Neela* (Nēla) □ Third wife of Vishnu, only in concept.
- Neelambari* (Nīlāmbari) □ A classical Ragam.
- Neerazhi* (Nīrāli) □ Temple tank or royal tank.
- Neettu* (Nīṭṭu) □ Royal directive.
- Nellikka* □ Gooseberry, Embilica Officials.
- Nelmuri* (Nelmuri) □ Grannary.
- Nel-pura* □ Grannary.
- Neryathu* (Nēryatu) □ Fine mundu with black boarder.
- Nira and Puthari* (Nīra and Puttari) □ Ritual of offering newly harvested rice at temples.
- Nira Vilakku* (Nīra Viḷakku) □ Offering involving the lighting of lamps inside the Nalambalam.
- Nirgunam* (Nirguṇam) □ Absolute Being without qualities.
- Nirmalya Puja* (Nirmālya Pūja) □ First worship of the day of the Deity in a temple.
- Nirmalya Moorthy* (Nirmālya Mūrti) □ A special concept of Divinity.
- Nirmalyam* (Nirmālyam) □ Previous day's flower decorations of a Deity.
- Nirvedam* (Nirvēdam) □ Detachment (Rough meaning only).
- Nivedyam* (Nivēdyam) □ Sanctified food offering.



- Nityanidanam* (Nityanidānam) □ System of daily worship.  
*Nitya Jeevatma* (Nitya Jīvātma) □ Soul in bondage without birth or death.  
*Nokku-vidya* (Nōkku-vidya) □ Art of optical concentration.

## O

- Ola* (Ōla) □ Cadjan.  
*Olakkuta* (Ōlakkuṭa) □ Cadjan umbrella.  
*Om̐karam* (Ōmkāram) □ The Primordial sound.  
*Ona Villu* (Ōṇa Villu) □ Bow made in connection with the Onam festival and submitted to the Temple on Thiru Onam.  
*Oordha* (ūṛḍha) □ Straight upward.  
*Oordha Tandavam* (Ūṛḍha Tāṇḍavam) □ Siva's dance pose involving raising one leg straight up.  
*Oru Divasathe Puja* (Oru Divasate Pūja) □ One whole day's Puja in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.  
*Otta Ada* (Or̐ra Aṭa) □ A sweet solid food offering to the Deity.  
*Ottakkal* (Or̐rkkal) □ Single stone.  
*Ottakkal Mandapam/Ekasila Mandapam* (Or̐rakkal Maṇḍapam/Ēkaśila Maṇḍapam) □ A very important single rock platform of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in front of the Sanctum Sanctorum.  
*Ottam-thullal* (Ōṭṭam Tuḷḷal) □ A semi classical folk art form of Kerala  
*Oottaras/Oottupuras* (Ūṭṭarās/Ūṭṭupurās) □ Dining areas.  
*Otta Thulappayasam* (Or̐ra Tulāppāyasam) □ A Nivedya of jaggery, rice etc. made to a specified single measure.

## P

- Pachu Moothathu* (Pāccu Mūttatu) □ A multi faceted personality from Vaikkom.  
*Padatti Pazham* (Padaṭṭi Paḷam) □ A type of plantain.  
*Padhati* (Padhati) □ System.  
*Padhathi Sampradaya* (Padhati Sampradāyam) □ Codes of ritualistic conduct traditionally passed down by word of mouth.  
*Padmagarbhham* (Padmagar̐bham) □ An elaborate royal ritual.  
*Padmam* □ Lotus.  
*Padmanabha Ashtotharasatham* (Padmanābha Aṣṭōttaraśatam) □ 108 holy names of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.  
*Padmanabha* (Padmanābha) □ He who possesses the lotus in the navel; Maha Vishnu.  
*Padmanabha-Dasa, Sree* (Padmanābha-Dāsa, Śrī) □ Title and honour of Travancore rulers and male members of the family.  
*Padmanabha-Swamy, Sree* (Padmanābha-Svāmi, Śrī) □ Presiding diety of Thiruvananthapuram.  
*Padmanabharadhana* (Padmanābhārādhana) □ Worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.  
*Padmanabha Keerthanam* (Padmanābha Kīrtanam) □ 18th century musical composition in Sanskrit by Kottayam Kerala Varma. (Prince Aswathi Thiurunal also has a work to his credit in this name with 'Sree' added to it).  
 CC-O. Nanaji Deshmukh Library, BJP, Jammu. Digitized By Siddhanta eGangotri Gyaan Kosha



- Padmanabhapuram* (Padmaṇābhapuram) □ Ancient capital of Venad.
- Padmanabha Vijayam* (Padmaṇābha Vijayam) □ Long poem in Sanskrit, 18th century by Subramonya.
- Padmanabhodayam* (Padmaṇabhodayam) □ Long poem in Sanskrit, 18th century.
- Padma Peetham* (Padma Pīṭham) □ Lotus base.
- Padma Puranam* (Padma Purāṇam) □ Ancient sacred text of this name.
- Padmasanam* (Padmāsanaṁ) □ A yogic pose of sense-control and meditation where one sits with legs crossed pressing on pressure points.
- Padma Teertham/Ananta Teertham/Bhadrakulam/Darpakkulam/Sree Padmanabha Teertham* (Padma Tīrtham/Ananta Tīrtham/Bhadrakuḷam/Darṇpakuḷam/Srī Padmaṇābha Tīrtham) □ Temple tank of fame affiliated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Painkuni* (Paiṅkuṇi) □ Corresponding to the 8th month of the Malayalam year.
- Pakshi-mala* (Pakṣi-māla) □ Picture garland of birds.
- Palam* □ Weight equal to almost 60 grams.
- Palavaka-arangu* (Palavaka-araṇṇu) □ Various art forms or one art presented variously. (Arangam)
- Palaazhi* (Pālāḷi) □ The ocean of milk.
- Pallakku Vahanam* (Pallakku Vāhanam) □ Palanquin vehicle.
- Pallava* □ One of the major South Indian dynasties.
- Palli Vetta* (Paḷli Vēṭṭa) □ Ritualistic hunt in a temple festival.
- Palli Villu* (Paḷli Villu) □ Holy bow.
- Pal Manga* (Pāl Māṇṇa) □ A Nivedyam mainly of milk and mango.
- Palppayasam* (Pālppāyasam) □ Milk, sugar and rice liquid delicacy.
- Palyam* (Pālyam) □ Place of one time importance near Kochi.
- Pampu Nadam* (Pāmpu Nādam) □ Music from the snake pipe.
- Panakam* (Pāṇakam) □ A sweetened liquid offering.
- Panam* (Paṇam) □ Money.
- Pancha Bhootas* (Pañca Bhūtas) □ The five elements of nature.
- Panchagavyam* (Pañcagavyam) □ Five products of cow which in combination are considered sacred.
- Panchagavyathu Nambi* (Pañcagavyattu Nambi) □ The high priest who alternates with the Periya Nambi in the worship of Sree Padmanabha Swamy at this Temple.
- Panchakshari* (Pañcākṣari) □ Five Syllabled holy Mantram of Siva (NAMASSIVAYA).
- Panchaloham* (Pañcalōham) □ Alloy of five metals - gold, silver, copper, tin and iron.
- Pancha Maha Durgas* (Pañca Maha Durgas) □ Five concepts of Goddess Durga.
- Pancha-mala* (Pañca-māla) □ Garland of pictures in five categories.
- Panchamayakosam* (Pañcamayakōśam) □ Five labrynths conceived as surrounding the Deity in a temple.
- Panchamritham* (Pañcāmṛtam) □ A mixture of five sweet ingredients.
- Panchapsarasu* (Pañcāpsarasu) □ Collective term for five sacred tanks.
- Pancharatram* (Pañcarāṭṛam) □ A system of Vishnu worship.
- Panchendriyas* (Pañcēndriyās) □ The five sense organs consisting of eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin.
- Pandavas* (Pāṇḍavās) □ Sons of King Pandu.



*Pandarakkanakkan* (Paṇḍārakkaṇakkan) □ Record writer of this Temple; for long the post was hereditary.

*Pantheeradi Puja* (Paṇṭīrati Pūja) □ Puja performed at the time of the day when man's shadow measures 12 feet before the sun reaches the Zenith.

*Pantheeradi Palppayasam* (Paṇṭīrati Pālppāyasam) □ Pre-noon Nivedyam of milk, sugar and rice.

*Pandi-vadyam* (Pāṇḍi-vādyam) □ Instrumental music by people from Pandi or Tamil Nadu.

*Pandya* (Pāṇḍya) □ A Tamil dynasty of South India.

*Panduvārali* (Pantuvarāḷi) □ Name of a Ragam.

*Pani* (Pāṇi) □ Hand.

*Panickar* (Paṇikkar) □ A section among the Nairs.

*Pani-kottu* (Pāṇi-koṭṭu) □ A certain kind of percussion instrument.

*Panni Kuthiya Mannu* (Panni Kuthiya Maṇṇu) □ Soil churned up by the Pig (Varaham)

*Panthrandu Kalam Payasam* (Paṇṭraṇḍu Kalam Pāyasam) □ Sweet rice food offering in twelve pots.

*Para* □ First stage of speech.

*Para* (Paṛa) □ A measurement.

*Paramananda Yogamoorthy* (Paramānanda Yōgamūrti) □ Yogic Divinity of extreme bliss.

*Paramatma* (Paramātma) □ Universal Soul.

*Parameswara* (Paramēśvara) □ A name of Siva.

*Parampara* □ Tradition.

*Parasurama* (Paraśurāma) □ Sixth Incarnation of Vishnu.

*Parasurama Padhati* (Paraśurāma Paddhati) □ Norms laid down by Sree Parasurama for worship.

*Parijatam* (Pārījātam) □ Tree of boons.

*Parikarmi* (Parikaṛmi) □ Assistant to the chief priest.

*Partha* (Pārṭha) □ Arjuna who is the 3rd of the 5 Pandava brothers.

*Parthasarathi* (Pārṭhasārathi) □ Charioteer of Partha, Krishna.

*Parthivapuram* (Pārṭhivapuram) □ Place in Kanyakumari district.

*Parvathi* (Pārṇvati) □ Wife of Sree Parameswara.

*Pasa* (Paśa) □ Gum.

*Pasam* (Pāśa) □ Rope.

*Pasupathastram* (Pāsupatāstram) □ Weapon given by Siva to Arjuna.

*Pasyanthi* (Paśyanti) □ 2nd stage of speech.

*Patalam* (Pātāḷam) □ Hell.

*Patanjali* (Patañjali) □ Sage, author of Yogasutram etc.

*Pathakam* (Pāṭhakam) □ Puranic narrations by Ambalavasis without holy thread (Arangam).

*Pati and Patiyettam* (Paṭi and Paṭiyēṭṭam) □ Ceremony performed by Travancore Royalty on specified occasions at the Temples of Sree Padmanabha and Sree Adi Kesava.

*Pathittu Pathu* (Paṭiṭṭu Pattu) □ Sangam (Tamil) work.

*Pattabhishekam* (Paṭṭābhiṣēkam) □ Coronation.

*Pattam* (Pāṭṭam) □ Lease, tax paid by tenants in cash or kind to the landlord.

*Pattathanam* (Paṭṭattāṇam) □ (The Sanskrit form is Bhaṭṭāṇam) Gift given to established scholars in Zamorin's court, Kozhikode, Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple etc.



*Pattu* (Paṭṭu) □ Silk.

*Pattu and Kacha* (Paṭṭu and Kacca) □ Red silk and off-white cloth connected with cremation rites.

*Pavakkoothu* (Pāvakkūttu) □ Puppet play (Arangam).

*Payasam* (Pāyasam) □ Sweet food offering.

*Peetham* (Pīṭham) □ Base, platform.

*Peralu* (Pērālu) □ Ficus Bengalensis (a tree).

*Periya* □ Big

*Periya Nambi* □ Chief priest attached to Sree Padmanabha Temple, Thiruvananthapuram.

*Periya Santhi* (Periya Śānti) □ Priest in attendance of the main priest in matters of worship.

*Periya Swamiyar* (Periya Svāmiyār) □ Senior Pushpanjali Swamiyar.

*Perumal* (Perumāḷ) □ God, King, Overlord.

*Perumal Palace* (Perumāḷ Palace) □ Palace of the King.

*Perumal-parai* (Perumāḷ-para) □ An olden time measurement of paddy for the Perumal.

*Perumpadappu Mooppan* (Perumpaṭappu Mūppan) □ Maharaja, Ruler of Cochin.

*Perumpadappu Swaroopam* (Perumpaṭappu Svarūpam) □ Cochin Royal Family

*Perumthiru Amritha Puja* (Perumtiru Amṛta Pūja) □ Great half yearly feast for the Deity.

*Perumthiru Amrithethu Puja* (Perumtiru Amṛtetu Pūja) □ Great half yearly feast for the Deity.

*Peyadichan Mandapam* (Pēyadiccān Maṇḍapam) □ One of the outer Mandapas of the Temple.

*Phala Sruthi* (Phala Śruti) □ Results derived from perusing certain religious texts, as indicated at their conclusion.

*Phalgunā* (Phalguṇa) □ Synonym for Arjuna the Pandava.

*Pingala* (Piṅgaḷa) □ A vital nerve.

*Pithru Teertham* (Piṭṭu Tīrtham) □ Thiruvallom Temple water source.

*Plakka* (Plākka) □ Jack.

*Plavin-pasa* (Plāvin-paśa) □ Leaf latex. *Atocarpus Integrifolia*.

*Poikkal Kuthira-attom* (Poikkāl Kutira-āṭṭam) □ Tamil folk dancers performing on stilts.

*Pongal* (Poṅgal) □ A kind of rice preparation popular in Tamil Nadu.

*Ponnum Siveli* (Poṇṇum Śivēli) □ Holy circumambulation of the Deities in the premises of the Temple.

*Pooradom* (Pūrāḍam) □ An asterism.

*Pooma Kalasam* (Pūrṇa Kalaśam) □ Pot filled with sacred liquid.

*Poorva Bhagam* (Pūrva Bhāgam) □ Former half.

*Poorvi Kalyani* (Pūrvi Kalyāni) □ A classical Ragam.

*Pooruruttati* (Pūrūruttāti) □ An asterism

*Poothana-moksham* (Pūṭaṇa-mōkṣam) □ An Attakkatha written by Prince Aswathi Thirunal, 18th century.

*Pooyam* (Pūyam) □ An asterism.

*Potti* (Pōṭṭi) □ Brahmin hailing from Tulu country Karnataka, term also used loosely for Brahmin priest.

*Prabandham* (Pṛabandham) □ A treatise.

*Pradyumnabhyudayam* (Pṛadyumnābhyudayam) □ Sanskrit drama in five acts of the 13th-14th century.



- Prajapathi* (Prajāpati) □ Creator, progenitor.
- Prakrit* (Prākṛit) □ An unsophisticated dialect in Sanskrit.
- Pralaya-kalam* (Pṛalaya-kālam) □ Time of the mighty flood.
- Pralayam* (Pṛalayam) □ Great Deluge.
- Pranajalam* (Pṛāṇajalam) □ Aqua which sustains life.
- Pranamayakosam* (Pṛāṇamayakōśam) □ One of the five demarcations of the physical structure of a temple.
- Pranaprathishta* (Pṛāṇapṛatiṣṭha) □ Consecration of life force.
- Pranan* (Pṛāṇan) □ Life force.
- Pranavam* (Pṛaṇavam) □ Omkaram.
- Pranava Maha Mantram* (Pṛaṇava Mahā Mantram) □ The most sacred incantation.
- Prasadam* (Pṛasādam) □ Remnants of the offerings to God.
- Prasanna Puja* (Pṛasanna Pūja) □ Last puja inside a temple performed at night, concluding night puja in a temple.
- Prasnam* (Pṛasṇam) □ Astrological calculations.
- Prathamam* (Pṛathamam) □ Jaggery and coconut milk (liquid) delicacy of Kerala.
- Pratyaksha Padmanabhan* (Pratyakṣa Padmaṇābhan) □ Sree Padmanabha Swamy in visible form.
- Prathishta* (Pṛatiṣṭha) □ Consecrated idol, act of consecration.
- Prayaschitha Roopams* (Pṛāyascitta Rūpams) □ Symbolic figures of atonement.
- Puja* (Pūja) □ Ritualistic worship.
- Pulavalayma* (Pulavālayma) □ Pollution consequent to birth and death.
- Pulavars* □ Hindu Tamil low caste.
- Pulaya* □ Low caste Hindu.
- Pulayi* □ Woman of the Pulaya community.
- Puliyilakkara* (Puliyilakkara) □ Fine white cloth with black border.
- Punyaham* (Puṇyāham) □ Holy water used for purification.
- Pura* □ Room.
- Puram* □ City.
- Puranam* (Purāṇam) □ A sacred work of vintage.
- Purushan* (Puruṣan) □ Man. In certain contexts, God.
- Purushasooktam* (Puruṣasūktam) □ 90th cosmogonical hymn of the 10th section of Rig Veda.
- Purushothaman* (Puruṣōttamā) □ Synonym of God.
- Pusha* (Puṣa) □ A nerve.
- Pushpaka Vimanam* (Puṣpaka Vimānam) □ Ravana's famed air-borne chariot.
- Pushpam* (Puṣpam) □ Flower.
- Pushpanjali* (Puṣpāñjali) □ Worship with flowers.
- Pushpanjali Swamiyar* (Puṣpāñjali Svāmiyār) □ Namboodiri who is elevated to the position of an ascetic and who performs flower worship in the sanctum.
- Pustaka Danam* (Pustaka Dānam) □ Gift of books.
- Puthari* (Puttari) □ New rice.
- Putharikkandom Maitanam* (Puttarikkāṇṭam Maitānam) □ Field gifted to Pulayas by kings to grow paddy for Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.



**R**

- Ragamalika* (Rāgamālika) □ Garland of Ragas, mixture of Ragas, series of musical Ragas.
- Ragas* (Rāgas) □ Musical notes.
- Rajarajeswari* (Rājarājēśvari) □ A name of goddess Durga.
- Rajas* □ Second of the three qualities
- Rajasam* (Rājasam) □ Pertaining to Rajoguna.
- Rajayogam* (Rājayōgam) □ Planetary position of prosperity.
- Rajyakaryam* (Rājyakāryam) □ Assembly dealing with State affairs.
- Rakshasan* (Rākṣasan) □ Demon.
- Rama* (Rāma) □ Son of Dasaratha, 7th incarnation of Sree Maha Vishnu.
- Ramacharitam* (Rāmacaritam) □ First Kavyam in Malayalam, 12th century A.D.
- Ramanujacharya* (Rāmānūjācārya) □ Famed Vaishnavite, propounder of Visishtadvaitam
- Ramakatha-pattu* (Rāmakathā-pāṭṭu) □ Folk-style sing-song representation of the Ramayanam by Ayyippilla Ashan.
- Raman-attom* (Rāman Āṭṭam) □ The Ramayanam in Malayalam enacted in eight days in local art style.
- Ramayanam* (Rāmāyaṇam) □ Famous epic by Valmiki.
- Random Mura* (Raṇḍām Muṛa) □ Second in order
- Rani* (Rāṇi) □ Queen.
- Ravana* (Rāvaṇa) □ Demon king killed by Sree Rama.
- Reti* □ Consort of Kama Deva, the Lord of love
- Retnappayasam* (Retnappāyasam) □ A special gaggery sweet offering to the Deity.
- Rig Veda* (Ṛg Vēdam) □ First of the four Vedas, most ancient scripture of the world.
- Rohini* (Rōhiṇi) □ An asterism - (Birth asterism of Bhagavan Sree Krishna).
- Rudran* □ God Siva.
- Rudraksham* (Rudrākṣam) □ Dried berry of Elacocarpus Ganitrus which is held sacred and used in prayer. It possesses curative powers.
- Rudra-veena* (Rudra-vīṇa) □ Long special type of stringed musical instrument.

**S**

- Sabari* (Śabari) □ Old woman who was a great devotee of Sree Rama.
- Sabdam* (Śabdam) □ Noise.
- Sabha* □ Assembly.
- Sachidanandam* (Saccidāṇandam) □ Definition of the Brahman.
- Sadhana-vidya* (Sādhana-vidya) □ Amazing feats drawing on powers of meditation.
- Saguna* (Saguṇa) □ That endowed with high attributes.
- Sahasradala Padmam* (Sahasradaḷa Padmam) □ Inverted thousand petalled lotus atop the brain.
- Sahasram* (Sahasraṃ) □ Thousand.
- Sahasranamam* (Sahasraṇāmam) □ Thousand sacred names of a Divinity.
- Sahasraram* (Sahasrāram) □ Visualised as inverted lotus of psychic energy on the skull brain.
- Saiva/Saivites* (Śaiva/Śaivīte) □ Pertaining to Sree Siva.



- Saiva Salagrama* (Śaiva Sālāgrāma) □ A rare sacred stone invested with Siva's power.
- Salagai* (Salāgai) □ An outdated denomination of money.
- Salagrama* (Sālāgrāma) □ Sacred stone of Vaishnava potency.
- Sala Yakshi* (Sāla Yakṣi) □ A gentle aspect of the Yakshi standing under the palm tree.
- Saluveswaran* (Sālūvēśvaran) □ A Siva Bhootam.
- Samadhi* (Samādhi) □ Demise of a Sanyasin or a place where the body of such a person is laid to rest; deep meditative state, the 8th stage of Yoga.
- Samadhi Kshetram* (Samādhi Kṣētram) □ Sanctuary or last resting place of a Saint's body. This place is deemed holy.
- Samajika* (Sāmājika) □ Accountant.
- Sama Vedam* (Sāma Vēdam) □ 3rd of the four Vedas.
- Samgramadheeran* (Saṅgrāmadhīran) □ Title of King Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (13th century) meaning Valient at war.
- Samkshepashaareerakam* (Samkṣēpaśārīrakam) □ A Sanskrit work by a Pushpanjali Swamiyar of this Temple.
- Samrudhyardham* (Samṛdhyartham) □ For prosperity.
- Sanakadi* (Saṅakādi) □ Sage Sanaka etc.
- Sandesa Kavyam* (Sandēśa Kāvyaṁ) □ Message in poetic form.
- Sandesam* (Sandēśam) □ Message.
- Sangam Age* (Saṅgam Age) □ A particular era in Madurai.
- Sangeetha Sabha* (Saṅgīta Sabha) □ Music organisation.
- Sankramam* (Saṅkramam) □ Solstice.
- Sanyasin* (Sanyāsin) □ Renunciate, monk.
- Sapthaham* (Saptāham) □ Reciting the Bhagavatam text in a span of seven days.
- Saptanadies* (Saptanādiēs) □ The seven nerves.
- Sapta Rishies* (Sapta Ṛṣīs) □ Seven Sages.
- Sapta Sindhu Teerthas* (Sapta Sindhu Tīrthās) □ Seven sacred rivers.
- Saraswathi Devi* (Sarasvati Dēvi) □ Goddess of learning.
- Sarkara Payasam* (Śarkara Pāyasam) □ Jaggery and rice sweet.
- Sarvam* (Sarvam) □ All, everything.
- Sarvajnanatmayeti* (Saṛvajñātmayeti) □ Author of Samkshepashaareerakam and Pushpanjali Swamiyar of Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple around 10th century AD.
- Sarvanganathan* (Saṛvāṅganāthan) □ Title bestowed on King Adithya Varma of Venad for his total physical mastery.
- Sastha* (Śāsta) □ Divine manifestation of Vishnu and Siva as their offspring.
- Sat* □ That which is.
- Satta Variyola* (Saṭṭa Variyōla) □ Legal guidelines.
- Satvam* □ One of the three attributes and the most elevated.
- Satyalokam* (Satyalōkam) □ Most elevated of the 14 worlds, seat of Brahma.
- Satyam* □ Truth.
- Satvagunam* (Śatvaguṇam) □ The most extolled among the three Gunas.
- Saveri* (Sāvēri) □ A classical Ragam.
- Sevas* (Sēvās) □ Services.
- Shakatasura Nigrahām* (Śakatāsura Nigrahām) □ Slaying of demon Sakata



- Shakti* (Śakti) □ Feminine aspect of Siva, force, potency.
- Shankara* (Śaṅkara) □ Another name of Siva.
- Shankarabharanam* (Śaṅkarābharaṇam) □ A classical Ragam.
- Shankaranarayanan* (Śaṅkaranārāyaṇan) □ A divine representation combining both Vishnu and Siva.
- Shankkini* (Śaṅkhiṇi) □ A nerve centre.
- Shankhu* (Śaṅkhu) □ Conch.
- Shantakararoopam* (Śāntākārārūpam) □ Embodied form of tranquility.
- Shantaswaroopam* (Śāntasvarūpam) □ Embodiment of peace.
- Shastra-kali* (Śāstra-kālī) □ Also known as Yatrakali performed by a section of Namboodiries.
- Shayanam* (Śayaṇam) □ Reclining.
- Shayana Pradakshinam* (Śayaṇa Pradakṣiṇam) □ Circumambulation in prostrate position around a temple.
- Selvan* (Śelvan) □ Tamil term of God, here Vishnu.
- Seshasayee* (Śēśasāyī) □ One who reclines on the serpent.
- Shankhu Teerthan/ Chakra Teertham* (Śaṅkhu Tīrtham/Cakṛa Tīrtham) □ Holy water source located on the Shankhumughom beach.
- Shantakaram* (Śāntākāram) □ Famous meditative verse on Maha Vishnu.
- Shadchakra* (Ṣaṭcakṛa) □ Six vital centres of the nervous system.
- Shadkarmas* (Ṣaṭkaṛmās) □ Six duties of Brahmins - teaching, learning etc.
- Shodasa Maha Danam* (Śoḍaśa Mahādāṇam) □ Sixteen great offerings.
- Shodasopachara Puja* (Śoḍaśōpācārā Pūja) □ Sixteen pronged elaborate worship.
- Sibika Vahanam* (Śibika Vāhaṇam) □ Pallakku Vahanam.
- Sila* (Śila) □ Stone.
- Silparetnam* (Śilparatnam) □ Authoritative text on sculpture by Sreekumaran
- Simham* □ Lion.
- Simhala* (Simhaḷa) □ A Ragam.
- Simhasana Vahanam* (Simhāsana Vāhaṇam) □ Throne Vehicle.
- Simha Vyali* (Simha Vyāḷi) □ Legendary mythical animal which is a combination of lion and dragon.
- Sindooram* (Sindūram) □ Vermilion.
- Sita Devi* (Sīta Dēvi) □ Wife of Sree Rama.
- Sita Raghavam* (Sīta Rāghavam) □ Sanskrit drama of Rama Panivada, 18th century.
- Siva* (Śiva) □ One of the Trinity possessing the destructive aspect.
- Sivabhootam* (Śivabhūtam) □ Minion of Siva.
- Siva Lingam* (Śiva Liṅgam) □ Basic aspect of Siva represented in stone as Lingam.
- Sivaratri* (Śivarātri) □ Festival in honour of Siva in the month of Kumbhom - 7th Malayalam month.
- Sivashakti Panchakshari* (Śivaśakti Pañcākṣari) Personifying Siva with Devi in Panchakshari.
- Siveli* (Śivēli) □ Ceremonial, ritualistic circumambulation of the Deities.
- Siveli Bimbam* (Śivēli Bimbam) Idol used for ceremonial ritualistic circumambulation.
- Sivelippura* (Śivēlippura) □ Corridor used for Siveli procession.
- Skandan* □ Sree Subramonyan.
- Skanda Puranam* (Skanda Purāṇam) □ One of the 18 Puranas.



*Skantham* □ Canto, Section.

*Sloka* (Slōka) □ Stanza.

*Smarana* (Smarāṇa) □ Remembrance - One of the nine forms of Bhakti.

*Somathiri* (Sōmātiri) □ Namboodiri who has performed the Soma Yaga.

*Soota* (Sūta) □ Disciple of Sree Veda Vyasa.

*Sopanam* (Sōpāṇam) □ Stone-steps leading to platform in front of the shrine.

*Soma Vamsham* (Sōma Vamśam) □ Lunar dynasty.

*Sparsam* (Spaṛśam) □ Touch.

*Sree* (Śrī) □ Term of respect, prosperity.

*Sreebeli* (Śrībeli) □ Ritualistic worship of the Deities.

*Sreebhandaram* (Śrībhāṇḍāram) □ Temple treasury.

*Sreebhootabeli* (Śrībhūtabeli) □ Food offerings ritually submitted to Divinities and spirits

*Sreechakram* (Śrīcakṛam) □ Mystical diagram representing seat of power.

*Sreekaryakar* (Śrīkāryakkār) □ Officer responsible for daily administration in a temple.

*Sreekaryam* (Śrīkāryam) □ Senior supervisory post in a temple.

*Sreekovil* (Śrīkōvil) □ Sanctum Sanctorum.

*Sreemad Bhagavatham* (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam) □ One of the 18 great Puranas; Visnavite in nature

*Sree Adi Sankara* (Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara) □ World famous philosopher of Advaitam - around 8th century B.C.

*Sreemukham* (Śrīmukham) □ Words from an exalted, spiritual personage.

*Sreepadam* (Śrīpādam) □ Holy feet of a Deity.

*Sreepadasooktam* (Śrīpādasūktam) □ A religious work in Sanskrit.

*Sree Padmanabha Charitham* (Śrī Padmaṇābha Caritam) □ Unpublished (Champu) manuscript in Sanskrit, 18th century, by Krishna Sharma of Maharaja Marthanda Varmas' court.

*Sree Padmanabha Keerthanam* (Śrī Padmaṇābha Kīrtanam) □ 18th century musical composition in Malayalam by Prince Aswathi Thirunal Rama Varma.

*Sree Padmanabha Pada Padma Satakam* (Śrī Padmaṇābha Pāda Padma Śatakam) □ A devotional poem.

*Sree Padmanabha Satakam* (Śrī Padmaṇābha Śatakam) □ 19th century devotional poem by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal.

*Sree Pandaravakai* (Śrī Paṇḍāravakai) □ That belonging to Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

*Sreeragam* (Śrīrāgam) □ A classical Ragam.

*Sree Rama Navami* (Śrī Rāma Navami) □ Sree Rama's birthday festival in the Malayalam month Meenom.

*Sreevatsam* (Śrīvatsam) □ Identification mark on Sree Padmanabha Swamy's chest.

*Sringara Sudhakara Bhanam* (Śrīṅgāra Sudhākara Bhāṇam) □ Romantic 18th century play in Sanskrit.

*Sruti* (Śruti) □ Mantra and Brahmana portion of Vedas.

*Sthapati* □ Chief sculptor.

*Stanaka* (Stāṇaka). □ Standing posture.

*State Ayacut* (State Āyacuṭṭu) □ Revenue records relating to land.

*Sthala Puranam* (Sthala Purāṇam) □ Legends pertaining to consecration of temples.

*Stotram* (Stōṭṛam) □ Hymn.



- Stupi Kalasam* (Stūpi Kalaśam) □ Crest pots placed on the roof or on the gopuram of a temple.
- Sudarsana Chakram* (Sudaṛśaṇa Cakṛam) □ Weapon of Maha Vishnu.
- Sudarsana Moorthy* (Sudaṛśaṇa Mūṛti) □ Deified concept of Sudarsana Chakram.
- Suddhi* (Śuddhi) □ Aspect of purity.
- Sudhyartham* (Śuddhyartham) □ For purification.
- Sudra* (Śūdra) □ One of the four caste divisions in Hinduism.
- Sugreeva* (Sugrīva) □ Younger brother of the monkey king Bali.
- Suka Sandesam* (Śuka Sandēśam) □ Sanskrit work of 10th or 11th century in particular style.
- Sundaram* □ Beautiful.
- Suparva Nagari* (Suparva Nagari) □ City of Indra.
- Sureswaracharya* (Surēśvarācārya) □ One of the prime disciples of Sree Sankara.
- Surutti* (Suruṭṭi) □ Classical Ragam.
- Sushumna* (Suṣumṇa) □ A vital nerve.
- Sutras* (Sūtras) Circular openings on walls as per rules of traditional architecture.
- Swamiyar* (Svāmiyār) □ Renunciate saint.
- Swamy* (Svāmy) □ Term of identification for God, religious personality, Brahmin.
- Swamiyar Madhom* (Svāmiyār Maṭham) □ Hermitage of the Swamiyar.
- Swargam* (Svaṛgam) □ Heaven.
- Swargavathil* (Svaṛgavātil) □ Gateway to Heaven.
- Swargavathil Ekadesi* (Svaṛgavātil Ēkādaśi) □ Most sacred day in the Vaishnava calendar.
- Swarna Kshetram* (Svarṇa Kṣētram) □ Temple of gold.
- Swarna Alankara Mandapam* (Svarṇa Alaṅkāra Maṇḍapam) □ Platform decorated with gold.
- Swaroopam* (Svarūpam) □ Sovereign dynasty.
- Swathi* (Svāti) □ An asterism.
- Swayamvaram* (Svayamvaram) □ Personal choice of groom from many by the royal bride.
- Swayambhu* (Svayambhu) □ Self manifested (normally relating to a divinity).
- Syanandoorapuram* (Syāṇandūrapuram) □ Ancient name for Thiruvananthapuram city.
- Syanandoorapura Varnana Prabandham* (Śyāṇandūra Pura Varṇana Pṛabandham) □ Authoritative work on this Temple by Sree Swathi Thirunal.
- Syanandoor Purana Samuchayam* (Syāṇandūra Purāṇa Samuccayam) □ A great comprehensive work by a Tulu Brahmin of the 12th century on the Thiruvananthapuram Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Syanandoor Purusha* (Syāṇandūra Puruṣa) Another name by which Sree Padmanabha Swamy is addressed.
- Syanandoorapurakshetra Varnanam* (Syāṇandūrapurakṣētra Varṇanam) □ Descriptive verses on the Temple of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.
- Syamanthakam* (Syamantakam) □ Name of a precious gem of Bhagavatam fame.



- Talaikanam* (Talaikaṇam) □ A levy.
- Thamara* (Tāmara) □ Lotus, (Nelumbium Speciosum) a flower.
- Tamas* □ Inertia, the third of the three qualities indicative of the negative qualities (Rough meaning).



- Tandavam* (Tāṇḍavam) □ Cosmic dance of God Śiva.
- Tantram* (Tanṭram) □ Codes, rituals, symbols and signs employed in temple worship.
- Tantracharyan* (Tanṭrācāryan) □ Master of Tantram.
- Tantra Pradanam* (Tanṭra Pradānam) □ Bestowing of Tantram.
- Tantra Samuchayam* (Tanṭra Samuccayam) □ A treatise on Tantram in Kerala.
- Tantri* (Tanṭri) □ Hereditary priest who is highest in rank in a temple, who is the deciding authority in all religious matters concerning it.
- Tarananallloor* (Taraṇanallūr) □ House name of the Tantries of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Teertham* (Tīrtham) □ Holy water source (pond, river etc. of sanctity).
- Tejah Brahman* (Tējah Brahman) □ Supreme Being conceived as radiance.
- Thai* (Tāi) □ Corresponds to Markaram, the 6th Malayalam month.
- Thamburu* (Tamburu) □ A stringed musical instrument.
- Thamburukkothu* (Tamburukkoṭṭu) □ Playing on Thamburu, a stringed musical instrument. (Arangam)
- Thampuran* (Tampurān) □ General term for the male members of Kerala Kshatriyas, applicable to their lady folk as well.
- Thetti* (Teṭṭi) □ A flower commonly used for worship, *Ixora Coccinea*.
- Thevaram* (Tēvāram) □ Personal Puja.
- Thekkaidam/Thekkaidathu* (Tekkaiṭam/Tekkaiṭatu) □ Sanctum of Sree Narasimha Swamy.
- Thekke Madhom* (Tekkē Matham) □ One of the four hermitages in Thrissur.
- Thimilapani* (Timilapāṇi) □ A percussion hand instrument.
- Thiru Ampati* (Tiru Ampāṭi) □ A common name of Sree Krishna shrine's in many Malayala Nadu temples.
- Thiru* (Tiru) □ Prefix denoting respect, prosperity.
- Thirumaal* (Tirumāl) □ Tamil term for Maha Vishnu.
- Thirumadappally* (Tirumaṭappalḷy) □ Temple kitchen.
- Thiruvolakka Mandapam/Thirunokku Mandapam* (Tiruvōlakka Maṇḍapam/Tirunōkku Maṇḍapam) □ One of the inner Mandapas of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.
- Thirumaeni Kaval Kurup* (Tirumēṇi Kāval Kuṟup) □ Special inner security staff of the Temple.
- Thirumudi Kalasam* (Tirumuṭi Kalaśam) □ Sacred ritual acknowledging and honouring the divinity in the ruler.
- Thirumukham* (Tirumukham) □ Divine face.
- Thirumuttam* (Tirumuṭṭam) □ Sacred open ground inside a temple.
- Thirunal* (Tirunāl) □ Birth star or birthday of divinity or royalty.
- Thiru Onam* (Tiru Ōṇam) □ An asterism, here it is the Thirunal asterism of Sree Padmanabha Swamy of this Temple.
- Thiruppathies* (Tiruppaties) □ Holy and specially sacred Vaishnavite centres, as identified by the Alvars.
- Thiruvadi* (Tiruvaṭi) □ Term denoting respect, indicative of a high status used for holy men and royalty.
- Thiruvanakkathudi* (Tiruvaṇakkāṭuḍi) □ Drum.
- Thiruvathira* (Tiruvātira) □ An asterism. Thirunal and festival in honour of Sree Śiva.
- Thiruvathirakkali* (Tiruvātirakkali) □ A traditional dance of Kerala by women.



- Thiruvatta-pasa* (Tiruvatta-paśa) □ Gum, Pinus Roxlreghir.
- Thiruvilakkam* (Tiruvilakkam) □ Ritual associated with Utsavam.
- Thiru Vilakku* (Tiru Vilakku) □ Holy lamp.
- Thiru Utayatayalam* (Tiru Utayatayālam) □ The gold brocade silk used to cover the main Idol of the Perumal from waist downwards.
- Thodi* (Tōḍi) □ A classical Ragam.
- Thorthu* (Tōrtu) □ Coarse cloth bit used as a towel.
- Thottakkattu Ashari* (Tottakkāṭṭu Āśāri) □ Famed Mason of 15th century during Adithya Varma's who was in charge of the Gopuram construction, including Pujas which preceded it.
- Thretha Yugam* (Trētā Yugam) □ 2nd of the four Ages.
- Thrikkarithika* (Trīkkāṛṭika) □ 3rd asterism, festival in the month of Vrichikom, relating to the birth star of Sree Subramonya Swamy.
- Thrikketta* (Trīkkēṭṭa) □ An Asterism.
- Thrippappoor Keezhperur* (Trīppāppūr Kīlpērūr) □ Branch of illustrious Kulasekhara rulers.
- Thrippadam* (Trīppādam) □ Holy feet
- Thrippali* (Trīppali) □ Long Pepper, (Piperlongum)
- Thrissur* (Trīśūr) □ City in central Kerala.
- Thyagaraja Bhagavathar* (Tyāgarāja Bhāgavatar) □ Acclaimed great saint, composer and musician of Thanjavoor.
- Thakil* (Takil) □ Percussion instrument like a drum beaten on both sides.
- Thalam* (Tālam) □ Unit of measurement.
- Thannikka* (Tāṇṇikka) □ Terminalia Ballerica.
- Thattu* (Taṭṭu) □ Platter.
- Thavazhi* (Tāvaḷi) □ Branch of a family.
- Thazhikkakutam* (Tālikakkuṭam) □ Globe-like structures on top of temple-roofs in permitted metals.
- Thimila* (Timila) □ A percussion instrument.
- Thrimadhuram* (Trīmadhuram) □ Banana cut in round shape and mixed with ghee and jaggery.
- Thriphala* (Trīphala) □ Mixture of three medicinal powders.
- Thrippappoor Muppan* (Trīppāppūr Mūppan) □ Next in line to the Throne, Yuvaraja.
- Thrippappoor Swaroopam* (Trīppāppūr Svarūpam) □ Venad Dynasty, Travancore Royal Family.
- Thrippati* (Trīppaṭi) □ Sopanam, sacred step.
- Thrippati Danam* (Trīppaṭi Dāṇam) □ Historic Deed of dedication of the Kingdom of Travancore to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by Maharaja Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma and later on by Dharmaraja.
- Thripura Sundari* (Trīpura Sundari) □ A concept of Devi Parvathi.
- Thrivikrama Avataram* (Trīvikrama Avatāram) □ Vamana in the process of lowering Mahabali.
- Thulabharrakall* (Tulābhārakall) □ Two stone pillars between which the scales would be fixed.
- Thulabharam* (Tulābhāram) □ Weighing a person against a specific commodity as offering in temples.
- Thulam* (Tulām) □ Third month of the Malayalam year, corresponds to October-November.
- Thulappayasam* (Tulāppāyasam) □ Rice-jaggery-ghee-sugar-candy sweet preparation.
- Thulapurusha Danam* (Tulāpuruṣa Dāṇam) □ Free distribution of gold equal to one's weight to Brahmins; a great royal gift.



*Thulasi* (Tuḷasi) □ The holy Basil (*Peimium Sanctum*), a plant sacred to Hindus.

*Thidhi* (Tithi) □ A lunar day.

*Tulu Brahmins* (Tuḷu Brāhmins) □ Brahmins from Karnataka.

*Tumburu* □ A celestial sage.

## U

*Ucha Puja* (Ucca Pūja) □ Afternoon worship.

*Udavaal* (Uṭavāl) □ Specially significant sword used by royalty.

*Udhava* □ Friend and disciple of Sree Krishna.

*Udukkum-pattu* (Uṭukkum-pāṭṭu) □ Bhagavathi songs or Ayyappa songs of both folk in local style accompanied by percussion instruments.

*Udukku* (Utukku) □ A small hand drum instrument.

*Udukku-kottu* (Uṭukku-kōṭṭu) □ Beating the percussion instrument termed Udukku with the hand.

*Ugram* □ Fierce.

*Unnayi Warriar* (Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar) □ Famous, literary figure of Kerala, author of *Nalacharitham Attakkatha*.

*Unni Appam* (Uṇṇi Appam) □ Sweet having jaggery base.

*Unnuneeli Sandesam* (Uṇṇunīli Sandēśam) □ A Manipravalam, messenger poem of the 14th century by Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma.

*Unjal Mandapam* (Uññāl Maṇḍapam) □ An auxiliary Mandapam.

*Upanayanam* (Upanayaṇam) □ Sacred ritual investiture of the holy thread.

*Upasakan* (Upāsakan) □ Committed devotee.

*Upparikkam Malika* (Upparikkam Mālīka) □ Chamber dedicated to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by Maharaja Marthanda Varma in Padmanabhapuram Palace.

*Uppumanga* (Uppumāṇṇa) □ Salted, unripe mango.

*Ural* (Ural) □ Store Pounder.

*Uralar* (Ūrālār) □ Trustee or manager of the temple.

*Uruli* (Uruli) □ Circular shallow wide mouthed bell-metal vessel.

*Usha* (Uṣa) □ Dawn.

*Usha Puja* (Uṣa Pūja) □ Dawn worship.

*Usha Nivedyam* (Uṣa Nivēdyam) □ Dawn-offering of food to god.

*Utsava Anujna* (Utsava Anujñā) □ Permission for the conduct of festival.

*Uttaman* (Uttaman) □ Superlative, the best.

*Uthradom* (Uṭrāṭom) □ An asterism.

*Uthrittathi* (Uṭriṭṭāti) □ An asterism.

*Uthrom* (Utrom) □ An asterism.

*Utharayanam* (Uttarāyaṇam) □ Period of sun's progress to the north of the Equator.

*Uthirakkoti* (Uṭirakkōṭi) □ Blood flag or red flag, symbol of protest.

*Utsavartham* (Utsavārṭam) □ For the Utsavam.

*Utsavam* □ Festival.

*Utsava Kalasam* (Utsava Kalaśam) □ Complex purificatory ritual connecting the Temple festival.



*Utsava Prabandham* (Utsava Pṛabandham) □ Treatise on festival at Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple authored by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal.

*Utsava Sivali* (Utsava Śīvēli) □ Ceremonial ritualistic festival circumbulation of the Deities.

*Uttama Yoga Moorthy* (Uttama Yōga Mūṛti) □ Concept of Yoga Moorthy as embodiment of perfection.

## V

*Vadakkaidam* (Vaṭakkaiṭam) □ Northern place, another usage for the Sreekovil of Sree Padmanabha Swamy.

*Vadakke Madhom* (Vaṭakkē Matham) □ One of the four hermitages in Thrissur.

*Vahanam* (Vāhaṇam) □ Vehicle.

*Vahana Puja* (Vāhaṇa Pūja) □ Worship of the vehicles.

*Vaideekans* (Vaidīkaṇs) □ Section of hereditary Namboodiries enjoying high standing in their community.

*Vaikhari* □ 4th and final stage of speech.

*Vaikunthom* (Vaikuṇṭham) □ Heavenly abode of Maha Vishnu.

*Vaishnavite* (Vaiṣṇavite) □ Pertaining to Vishnu.

*Vajrayudhom* (Vajrāyudham) □ Indra's famed weapon.

*Valerumkala-vidya* (Vālēṛumkala-vidya) □ Trick or art of sword throwing.

*Valia* □ Big.

*Valia Kanikka* (Valia Kāṇikka) □ Big or significant money offering to a Deity.

*Valia Kottaram* (Valia Koṭṭāram) □ Big Palace (Term used for the residential complex of Travancore rulers situated within the Fort).

*Valli* (Vallī) □ A tribal chief's daughter who later on became the wife of Sree Subramonya Swamy.

*Valmiki* (Vālmiki) □ The great saint who authored the sacred epic Ramayana.

*Valum Parichayum Dandippu* (Vāḷum Paricayum Daṇḍippu) □ Sword and shield art of self defence.

*Valia Kalasam* (Valia Kalaśam) □ Highly complex ritual during the festival.

*Valia Madappally* (Valia Maṭappallī) □ Big kitchen.

*Valia Palppayasam* (Valia Pālppāyasam) □ Milk, rice and sugar liquid sweet prepared in larger quantities.

*Valia Thampuram* (Valia Tampurān) □ Senior most male member of a Kshatriya clan.

*Valvizhungi Vidya* (Vālviṣuṇi Vidya) □ Trick or art of sword swallowing.

*Vamacharam* (Vāmācāram) □ A system of Tantric worship (satvic).

*Vamanan* (Vāmaṇan) □ 5th incarnation of Vishnu.

*Vamsham* (Vamśam) □ Dynasty.

*Vanabhojanam* (Vaṇabhōjaṇam) □ Picnic in the forest.

*Vanavasam* (Vaṇavāsam) □ Duration of living in the forest.

*Vana-mala* (Vaṇa-māla) □ Garland of the forest.

*Vanchi* (Vañci) □ Boat.

*Vanchi Nadu* (Vañci Nāḍu) □ Domain of Travancore.



- Vanchi Raja Vamsham* (Vañci Rāja Vamśam) □ Dynasty of the Vanchi Kings.
- Vanchiyar Kulapathi* (Vañciyār Kulapati) □ Tamil title of the Vañchi King.
- Varadabhaya Moorthy* (Varadābhaya Mūrti) □ Dispenser of boons and refuge.
- Varada* □ Dispenser of boons.
- Varaham* (Varāham) □ 3rd incarnation of Vishnu as boar.
- Varaha Puranam* (Varāha Purāṇam) □ A Mahā Purāṇam.
- Varma* (Varṇa) □ Caste name of Kshatriyas
- Varnam* (Varṇam) □ Complex South Indian classical composition in music.
- Varnanam* (Varṇaṇam) □ Description.
- Varuna* (Varuṇa) □ God of the Seas.
- Varnodhara Tantram* (Varṇōdhāra Tantram) □ A Tantric book
- Varyam* (Vāryam) □ A type of temple offering.
- Varya Pakarcha* (Vārya Pakaṛca) □ Transfer of right of Varyam.
- Vasulakshmee Kalyanam* (Vasulakṣmī Kalyāṇam) □ 18th century Sanskrit drama by Sadasiva Dikshithar.
- Vasishta* (Vasiṣṭha) □ Famed sage, preceptor of the Solar dynasty.
- Vasudeva* (Vāsudēva) □ Father of Sree Krishna.
- Vasumathee Kalyanam* (Vasumatī Kalyāṇam) □ Sanskrit drama of late 12th or early 13th century.
- Vasya Ganapathy* (Vaśya Gaṇapati) □ A special concept of Ganapathy.
- Vathil Madom* (Vātil Māṭam) □ Raised platform flanking inner corridor.
- Vatsan* □ A sweet jaggery and rice preparation.
- Vattezhuthu* (Vaṭṭeḷuttu) □ Ancient Malayalam script.
- Vattaka Prasadam* (Vaṭṭaka Prasādam) □ Special Prasadam given only to the royalty and select few.
- Vattathil-chattom* (Vaṭṭattil-cāṭṭam) □ Circular acrobatics.
- Vayu* (Vāyu) □ Air, Lord of Air.
- Vazhipadu* (Vaḷipāḍu) □ Offerings of religious nature.
- Vazhipadu Siveli* (Vaḷipāḍu Śivēli) □ Ceremonial ritualistic circumambulation as offering.
- Vedas* (Vēdās) □ Ancient Hindu scriptures.
- Veda-Mantra-Japam* (Vēda-Mantra-Japam) □ Prayers involving the Vedas.
- Veda Vyasa Muni* (Vēda Vyāsa Muṇi) □ Sage of lasting fame of Bharatha who bifurcated the scriptures into four and authored the Puranas.
- Veena* (Vīṇa) □ A stringed musical instrument of India.
- Veerabhadran* (Vīrabhadraṇ) □ One of the incarnations of Siva, now commonly considered to be His attendant.
- Veerapandya Chilavu* (Vīrapāṇḍya Cilavu) □ A special temple service of yore instituted in this Temple to mark a military victory.
- Veekka Chenda* (Vīkka Ceṇḍa) □ A kind of drum.
- Velan* (Vēlan) □ Member of a semi-tribal community from central Travancore.
- Velakali* (Vēlakali) □ A mock battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas enacted in the temple grounds or outside temples during festivals.
- Velan-thullal* (Vēlan-tuḷḷal) □ Folk art form performed by the Velan Community.
- Velikkalppura* □ Area where the main Beli stone is situated.



- Venad, Vanchinad* (Vēnād, Vancinād) □ Domain of Travancore.
- Venguchari-kolam* (Veṅgucāri-kōlam) □ Stylised ritual of the Kanian folk.
- Venugopalan* (Vēṇugōpālan) □ Sree Krishna with Venu or flute in hand.
- Vethalam* (Vētālam) □ A hostile spirit.
- Vetta* (Vēṭṭa) □ Ceremonial symbolic hunt here on the night of the 9th day of the festival prior to the concluding day.
- Vettakkorumakan* (Vēṭṭakkorumakan) □ The hunter God, Son of Siva and Parvathi.
- Vettum Thadayam* (Veṭṭum Taṭayum) □ Martial art of offence and defence.
- Vibhooti* (Vibhūti) □ Holy ash.
- Vidya* □ Knowledge.
- Vigraham* □ Idol.
- Vijayan* □ Dwarapalakan of God Vishnu.
- Vijnanamayakosam* (Vijnāṇamayakōśam) □ One of the five physical demarcations of the temple representing areas of erudition.
- Vilakku* (Viḷakku) □ Lamp.
- Vilakku Madom* (Viḷakku Māṭom) □ Wooden frames with lamp holders.
- Villu* □ Bow
- Vilpattu* (Vilpāṭṭu) □ Folk song presentation where the singers sing beating time on the bow string.
- Vilva Sarappoli Mala* (Vilva Śarappoli Māla) □ Gold necklace of a certain traditional design.
- Vilvamangalam* (Vilvamaṅgalam) □ Swamiyar linked to the reconsecration of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple and many others.
- Vimanam* (Vimāṇam) □ Roof.
- Vinayaka Chathurthi* (Viṇāyaka Caturṭhi) □ 4th day of the brighter half of the lunar month in Chingom.
- Visakhom* (Viśākhom) □ An asterism.
- Vishnu* (Viṣṇu) □ One among the Trinity in whom vests the responsibility of preservation.
- Vishnu Amsham* (Viṣṇu Amśam) □ Part of Vishnu.
- Vishnu Padam* (Viṣṇu Pādam) □ Feet of Vishnu, also the sky.
- Vishnu Puja* (Viṣṇu Pūja) □ Ritualistic worship to propitiate Maha Vishnu.
- Vishnu Samhita* (Viṣṇu Samhita) □ A holy text.
- Vishu* (Viṣu) □ Malayalam New Year, indicating prosperity. (First day of Samvat year) - mid April.
- Vishukani* (Viṣukaṇi) □ First Vishu offering.
- Vishnu Sahasranamam* (Viṣṇu Sahasranāmam) □ Thousand sacred names of Maha Vishnu.
- Visvaroopam* (Viśvarūpam) □ Mighty Cosmic form.
- Vishnu Puranam* (Viṣṇu Purāṇam) □ Sacred work on Maha Vishnu.
- Vishwakṣenan* (Viṣvaksēṇan) □ Synonym of Vishnu, consecrated separately as Nirmalya Moorthy.
- Visishta Advaitam* (Viśiṣṭa Advitam) □ Qualified non-dualism.
- Vaiswadeva Homam or Vaiswa Homam* (Vaiśvādēva or Vaiśva Hōmam) □ A ritualistic fire oblation.



*Vraja Bhasha* (Vṛāja Bhāṣa) □ Language of the Gopas.

*Vrischikom* (Vṛścikom) □ Corresponds to Malayalam month mid November to mid December.

*Vyaghrapada Muni* (Vyāghrapāda Muṇi) □ A sage featured in many legends and Sthala Puranas eg. of Vaikkom.

*Vyali* (Vyāli) □ Legendary dragon.

*Vyaptam* (Vyāptam) □ Expansiveness.



*Yadava* (Yādava) □ A community, here a sub sect of Kshatriyas (not to be confused with the shepherd community).

*Yadavendrakuladaivam* (Yādavēndrakuladaivam) □ Dynastic Deity of the Yadava clan.

*Yadukula Kambogi* (Yadukula Kāmbōji) □ A classical Ragam.

*Yaga* (Yāga) □ Holy Vedic sacrifice performed to propitiate the Gods.

*Yajur Vedam* (Yajur Vēdam) □ One of the four Vedas.

*Yajnam* (Yajñam) □ Holy sacrifice, elaborate ritual.

*Yajnopaveetham* (Yajñōpavītam) □ Holy thread indicative of high caste.

*Yakshi* (Yakṣi) □ Female demi-god.

*Yama* □ King of Death.

*Yamunacharya* (Yāmunācārya) □ Royal scholar and great Vaishnavite saint also known as Alavandar.

*Yashaswini* (Yaśasvīni) □ A prominent nerve centre.

*Yashoda* (Yaśōda) □ Foster mother of the child Krishna.

*Yatrotsavam* (Yātṛōtsavam) □ Interpreted as procession for the holy immersion of the Deities to the seafront.

*Yavam* □ Barley.

*Yoga* (Yōga) □ Control of mind by meditation and body by exercise.

*Yogadandu* (Yōgadaṇḍu) □ Staff of an ascetic, used for Yogic practices and as symbol of renunciation.

*Yogakkar* (Yōgakkār) □ Members of the Yogam.

*Yogam* (Yōgam) □ Council/assembly.

*Yoga Nidra* (Yōga Nidra) □ Conscious cosmic slumber.

*Yoga Sastram* (Yōga Śāstram) □ Science of Yoga by Sage Patañjali.

*Yogathil Pottimar/Potties* (Yōgattil Pōṛṛimār/Pōṛṛies) □ Potti members of the Ettara Yogam.

*Yogi* (Yōgi) □ One who follows the path of Yoga.

*Yojana* (Yōjana) □ A measurement of distance. 10 Yojana equal 80 miles.

*Yuvaraja* (Yuvarāja) □ Second in line to the throne.



*Zamindar* (Zamīndār) □ Feudal land lord possessing vast areas of land as well as power.

*Zamorin* (Zāmōṛin) □ The hereditary King of Kozhikode/Calicut. One of the three important rulers of Malayala Nadu.



# INDEX

## A

- Abhishekam 40, 43, 45, 107, 154, 186, 242, 243, 246, 247, 257, 263, 276, 304, 310, 313, 318, 325, 327, 330, 334, 337, 348-351, 353, 354, 367, 376, 402
- Abhisravana Mandapam 79, 112, 116, 117, 207, 256-259, 270, 275, 320, 326, 330, 331, 337, 341, 347, 350, 351, 365
- Achyuta 408
- Adi Kesava 20, 40, 69, 72, 82, 92, 108, 221, 246, 283, 320, 437
- Adi Sankara 48, 390
- Adi Sessa 12, 53, 149, 389, 391, 413
- Agastya, Sage 15, 42, 379
- Agastya Teertham 396
- Agni Konu 225
- Agnihotram 299
- Agrashala 50, 185, 196, 198, 224, 239, 320, 326, 329, 367, 406, 410
- Agrashala Ganapathy 50, 185, 196, 224, 239, 321, 322, 325, 401, 404
- Ahalya-moksham 269
- Akhilandakotibrahmanda-nayakan 297
- Akkara 19, 21, 54, 98, 99, 146, 304, 305
- Akkara Desies 98, 99, 146, 304, 305
- Aksharasankhya 52
- Alankara Mandapam 116, 267, 269, 331, 337, 340, 343, 368
- Alankara Priya 225
- Alankara Sivali 327
- Alankara-vidvans 280
- Alankaram 304, 315
- Alippuram-thullal 280
- Alvars 20, 58, 63, 297, 385
- Amappalaka 73, 314
- Ambalappuzha Palppayasam 154, 317
- Amritha Kalasam 40, 41, 243
- Amritham 245
- Ana Uruviruttal 354
- Anandamayakosam 274
- Ananta 11, 12, 14, 19, 21, 26, 28, 38-40, 54, 78, 132, 133, 135-137, 142, 146, 163, 235, 236, 248, 251, 262, 266, 267, 279, 294, 329, 338, 358, 370, 393, 394, 397, 399-401, 405, 412-416, 418, 423, 431
- Anantankatu 14, 17, 19, 21, 25, 272, 302, 377, 410
- Ananta Vahanam 144, 162, 324, 333, 334
- Anantasana Moorthy 243
- Anavaal 147, 233, 336, 367
- Anizhom Thirunal Marthanda Varma, Maharaja 18, 32, 67, 86, 89, 100, 110, 121, 131, 143, 153, 169, 206, 217, 236, 260, 286, 299, 321, 333, 338, 344, 347, 357, 369, 373, 409, 435
- Anki 40, 132, 148, 162, 192, 196, 322, 335, 362
- Ankusam 40, 41
- Annadanam 181, 370
- Annamayakosam 273
- Annaprasam 369
- Anoopa Desam 265
- Anujna 100, 109, 112, 141, 145, 147, 300, 308, 328, 436
- Appam 199, 245, 318, 320, 342, 343, 360, 361
- Ara 74, 239, 435
- Aradhana 9
- Arangams 116, 168, 186, 216, 226, 279, 284, 348, 371, 375
- Arat 16, 18, 61, 93, 100, 103, 123, 131, 136, 142, 145, 155, 166, 167, 190, 192, 193, 221, 223, 237, 278, 304, 309, 312, 328, 333-335, 337-341, 347, 348, 382, 383, 396, 397, 402, 420, 423, 436
- Aravanappayasam 319
- Archana 193, 195, 196, 198, 200, 388
- Ardhaya Deeparadhana 320
- Asareeri 173, 220, 223
- Ashari 84, 91, 117, 132, 191, 219, 232, 240, 271, 325, 326
- Ashramam 304, 373
- Ashtabandha Kalasam 189, 199
- Ashtabandhalepanam 265
- Ashtabandham 132, 159, 165, 312, 313
- Ashtadikpalakas 45, 116, 270
- Ashtami 326
- Ashtapati 277, 319
- Ashtayudha Purushas 287
- Aswathi Thirunal Umayamma Rani, Regent Queen 102
- Aswatthama 215, 216, 268
- Athazha Palppayasam 140
- Athazha Puja 303, 319, 342, 343, 349
- Athazha Sivali 342
- Atimayital 145, 433



Attathodu Veerashrinkhala 219, 234  
 Attingal Mootha Thampuram 117, 135, 142, 433  
 Avabhrita Snanam 134  
 Avanappalaka 319  
 Avatharam 288, 289  
 Avittom Thirunal 140  
 Ay Kings 57, 59, 60, 67, 432  
 Ayana Sankranti Azhakiya Manikkasiveli 346  
 Ayillyom Thirunal Rama Varma 158  
 Ayillyom Thirunal Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi 142  
 Ayiramkal Mandapam 240, 248  
 Ayyan Adigal Thiruvadigal 58  
 Ayyanpilla Ashan 215, 216  
 Ayyippilla Ashan 215, 216  
 Azhuvancheri Thamprakkal 70, 351, 353

## B

Badha Jeevatma 47, 51  
 Balabhadran 288  
 Balalayam 79, 96, 109, 112  
 Balaranya Konideva 113, 207  
 Beejakshara 36  
 Beli 44, 46, 50, 196, 220, 221, 236, 240, 248, 249, 271, 272, 303, 304, 307, 312, 317, 318, 320, 323, 333, 336, 337, 413  
 Belikkal 51, 116, 164, 173, 192, 196, 205, 219, 222, 226, 237, 248-251, 254, 255, 271-273, 332, 367, 402, 404  
 Belikkalppura 96, 248  
 Bhadra Kulam 134  
 Bhadradeepam 114, 133, 236, 322, 344-346, 351, 355, 436  
 Bhadradeepappura 52, 114, 173, 196, 223, 236, 322, 327, 344, 356  
 Bhagavatham 231, 286, 291, 312, 380  
 Bhagyasooktham 311  
 Bhakti 54, 63, 151, 249, 286, 377, 379, 412, 419, 430  
 Bhakti Manjari 419  
 Bhanu Vikraman 56  
 Bharani Thirunal Jayasimha Deva II of Venad 81  
 Bharani Thirunal Veera Marthanda Varma 78  
 Bharatha Muni 139, 415  
 Bhargavarama 292  
 Bheeshma 255, 258  
 Bhoomi Devi 43, 44, 85, 107, 253, 287, 289, 315, 331, 347, 392, 404  
 Bhoota-mala 286

Bhootam 196, 220, 221, 236, 243, 246, 252, 254, 289, 333, 343, 413  
 Bhoothala Veera Rama Varma 85, 432  
 Bhoothanatha 313  
 Bhrigu 43, 263  
 Bimbam 39, 42, 43, 263, 310, 330, 331, 337, 341, 343  
 Body 11, 18, 26, 33, 34, 38, 47, 53, 54, 111, 128  
 Brahma 10, 12, 14, 19, 20, 22, 32, 35, 36, 38, 42, 243, 244, 250, 252, 257, 262, 263, 267, 270, 287, 289, 290, 313, 330-332, 335, 376, 378-380, 389, 396, 408, 423, 424, 436  
 Brahma Kalasam 257, 330-332, 389, 436  
 Brahma Teertham 376, 380, 396  
 Brahman 35, 37, 243, 311, 351, 395  
 Brahmanda 26, 43, 56, 57, 118, 246, 293, 297, 302, 356, 377  
 Brahmanda Tandava Moorthy 246

## C

Celestials 10, 34, 38, 42, 45, 49, 82, 90, 119, 243, 244, 247, 262, 267, 274, 287, 288, 303, 305, 313, 376, 388, 407, 426  
 Chaitanya Mahaprabhu 408  
 Chaitra Mahotsavam 417  
 Chakra Teertham 15, 378, 380, 383, 396  
 Chakrabja Puja 52  
 Chakram 11, 12, 39, 40-42, 44, 48, 50, 51, 54, 70  
 Chalayil Kalahasti 287, 289  
 Champu 400, 409  
 Chandanam 258, 264, 266, 345  
 Chandra 376  
 Chandra Vamsham 58  
 Chandralayam 282  
 Changala 291  
 Chathurbahu 245  
 Chathurthi 192, 322, 325  
 Chellamvakai Karyakkar 180  
 Chempakathumootu Nata 19, 228, 229, 235, 338  
 Chempu 216  
 Chera 56, 57, 59-61, 63, 67, 79, 113, 123, 125, 381-385, 390  
 Cheraman Perumal, Maharaja 63, 79, 123, 169, 254, 358  
 Cheramudi 79  
 Cheratta 315



Cheruchuttu 46, 116, 124, 147, 198, 257, 259,  
267, 268, 275, 285, 287, 314, 317, 319,  
320, 331, 337, 343, 347, 355  
Chiramjeevi 44, 49  
Chirappu 153, 154, 162, 195, 200, 228, 322,  
325, 342, 434  
Chiravayi Mooppam 66, 89, 94, 95, 97,  
104-107, 111, 205, 365, 433, 435  
Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma 1, 7, 51, 63,  
81, 138, 167-169, 209, 222, 228, 235,  
260, 267, 270, 285, 287, 322, 367, 434  
Chithra Pournami 349  
Chitra-mala 286  
Chola 13, 56, 59, 63, 210, 227, 231, 248,  
275, 379, 390, 397, 403  
Chotta 309, 331  
Chukku 265  
Churuna 69, 70, 73, 81, 84, 90, 135, 294,  
295, 302, 308  
Chuttambalam 82, 96, 140, 147, 226, 249,  
255  
Chuttu Mandapam 79  
Chuttu Vilakku 154, 227, 236  
City 14-17, 19-22, 24, 29, 30, 67, 103, 113,  
154, 156, 161, 191, 216, 231, 240, 260,  
299, 334, 339, 348, 370, 372, 375-377,  
379, 380, 382, 385, 387, 388, 392,  
395-399, 401, 405, 407, 409, 410, 415,  
417, 419, 422, 425, 426, 428, 436  
Coins 64, 78, 79, 139, 155, 158, 198, 200,  
218, 223, 235, 356, 433

## D

Dakshina 17, 308, 396  
Dakshinamoorthy 45, 267, 289  
Dalava 17, 126, 140, 338  
Danam 30, 56, 61, 63, 67, 78, 86, 92,  
95, 118, 119, 121, 123-125, 130, 131,  
133, 142, 153, 156, 160, 161, 164, 183,  
188, 206, 220, 235, 294, 297, 335, 344,  
356-358, 373, 375, 399, 409, 431, 432,  
435-437  
Dandu 44, 299, 317  
Darbha 301, 332, 340  
Darpa Kulam 114  
Darsanam 18, 27, 215, 240, 314, 319, 342,  
343, 349, 359, 377, 385, 388, 420  
Dasa 1, 4, 12, 40, 63, 108, 110, 113, 119,  
121, 128, 140, 149, 156, 158, 160, 163,  
164, 169, 174, 191, 195, 210, 240, 267,  
302, 305, 336, 355, 392, 415, 431, 433  
Dasathalam 263

Deepa Sthambhas 133, 229, 237, 257  
Deepagriham 271  
Deepalakshmi 115, 233, 240, 242, 256  
Deepam 319, 436  
Deeparadhana 49, 53, 54, 140, 143, 153, 159,  
172, 199, 234, 237, 274, 276-278, 304,  
310-312, 315, 318-320, 325, 327, 331,  
336, 337, 340, 343, 346-348, 362  
Deeparadhana Thattu 140, 172  
Deepayaga Mandapam 344  
Desavatharam 231, 234, 325, 326  
Deshikal 76  
Devaprasnam 180, 196  
Devaswom 73, 102, 106, 144, 176, 177, 182,  
218  
Devata 48, 267, 432  
Dewan 98, 112, 113, 121, 129, 130, 140, 141,  
147, 151, 157, 158, 160, 161, 170, 175,  
233, 338  
Dharmaraja 108, 112, 137-140, 302, 401,  
414-416, 428, 432  
Dhwaja Sthambham 207, 227, 233, 248, 252,  
271, 274, 277, 332, 340, 354  
Dhwajam 40, 41  
Dhyanam 48, 243  
Divakara Muni 24-28, 305, 374, 377, 393,  
395, 421  
Dravya Kalasam 329, 330, 341, 342  
Dwarapalakan 251, 253, 254, 288, 366, 367  
Dwarapalikas 272, 289  
Dwithalam 262

## E

Edanazhi 204, 249, 255, 256, 258  
Edayil Madhom 298  
Eighteen 18, 26, 40, 44, 52, 137, 150, 229,  
260-263, 374, 375  
Ekasila Mandapam 44, 260  
Elanji 336  
Embran 393  
Erattakulavazha Chirappu 154  
Etakka 196, 269, 319  
Ethirtu Puja 303, 312, 316, 318, 332, 341  
Ettara Yogam 19, 33, 63, 65, 71, 73-75, 81,  
82, 87-93, 95, 96, 99-101, 103, 108, 109,  
111, 114, 134, 141, 143, 145, 147, 220,  
295, 299, 300, 308, 328, 433, 435, 436  
Ettuveetil Pillamar 109  
Ezharapponnana 135  
Ezhunnallathu 329  
Ezhuthani 290



**G**

- Ganapathy 21, 22, 45, 46, 50, 51, 90, 124, 185, 186, 193, 197, 215, 225, 226, 236, 239, 244, 245, 255, 256, 260, 262, 288-290, 292, 316, 322, 325, 353, 363
- Garbha Griham 262
- Garbhasreeman 149
- Garuda 39, 44, 47, 53, 114-117, 147, 232, 237, 238, 243, 246, 250, 251, 253-256, 261, 263, 269, 272, 274, 281, 287, 313, 319, 324, 332-334, 346, 353, 387, 391, 401, 404, 405, 412, 413, 423
- Garuda Deepam 319
- Garuda Vahanam 114, 117, 164, 333-336, 387
- Garva-kettu 75, 76, 83, 372
- Gayatri 36, 243
- Gopuram 51, 52-54, 80, 90, 91, 106, 108, 127, 129, 154, 158, 159, 172, 187-189, 201, 206, 217, 223, 226-232, 334, 348, 354, 401, 409
- Goshala 21, 76, 154, 179, 202, 205, 273, 306
- Grantha-pura 68, 150, 237, 307
- Granthavari 47, 68, 79, 138
- Gunas 38, 52, 252, 283

**H**

- Hanuman 19, 22, 46, 47, 49, 51, 116, 134, 141, 142, 162, 164, 173, 176, 196, 198, 213, 214, 222, 232, 243-247, 249-251, 254, 256, 258, 260, 261, 269, 272, 283, 289, 311, 313, 353, 362, 367, 404
- Hari Vamsham 56
- Harikathakalakshepam 284
- Hiranyagarbham 56, 61, 63, 121, 123-125, 130, 131, 142, 153, 156, 160, 161, 164, 188, 242, 294, 357, 358, 436, 437
- Homa Kundam 235
- Homam 90, 121, 193, 215, 235, 316, 327
- Homappura 51, 193, 235, 327
- Hridaya Kamalam 35

**I**

- Idichupizhinja Payasam 135, 360
- Ikkara 21, 54, 98, 99, 146, 304, 305
- Ikkara Desies 21, 54, 98, 99, 146, 305
- Ilankovadigal 61, 383
- Illom 66, 73, 87, 89, 107, 112, 158, 205, 220, 292-296, 403
- Iluppa tree 26-28, 266
- Indra Vahanam 130, 138, 154, 333, 334

- Iravi Adithya Varma 81
- Ivory cradle 268, 326

**J**

- Jalajapam 119, 351, 352
- Jangala Desam 265
- Japam 90, 350
- Jayan 44, 231, 253, 254, 261
- Jeeva Dandam 49, 258
- Jeeva Jalam 12
- Jeevatmas 47

**K**

- Kaimani 277
- Kaimukku Satyam 98
- Kaivatta 293
- Kakka-oottu 238
- Kalabha Kalasam 145
- Kalabhabhishekam 353
- Kalabham 236, 310, 344, 345, 349, 351, 353, 359
- Kalasa Puja 331, 347
- Kalasam 84, 95, 98-100, 114, 132, 257, 295, 303, 312, 328-332, 341, 345-347
- Kamala Vahanam 333, 334, 423
- Kandalloor Salai 17, 59
- Kanikka 69, 143, 153, 300, 334, 346
- Kanni-konu 271
- Kanni-moola 236, 290, 322
- Kapplingadu School 279
- Karakam 330
- Karanatta Kurup 74, 111, 328, 435
- Karikku Mandapam 338
- Karkkataka Siveli 300, 349, 436
- Karpoora Deepam 319
- Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma, Maharaja 13, 23, 67, 127, 128, 228, 230, 240, 279, 409, 415, 432
- Karuvelamkulam Puja 77, 87, 96
- Katu-Sarkara-Yogam 38, 42, 262-264, 266, 267
- Kavara Vilakku 190, 257, 275, 319
- Keezhedam 19
- Keralaputhra 57
- Kezhavan Raja 139
- Kilikinnam 117, 316
- Kindi 270, 330
- King Veera Iravi Iravi Varma 68, 78, 346, 365



Koil Adhikarikal 63  
 Kola Swaroopam 69, 107, 108, 110, 133, 142,  
 163, 230, 344  
 Kolu Vilakku 300  
 Koothambalam 242  
 Koshtha 267  
 Koshtha Devata 267  
 Kothala Veera Marthanda Varma 86, 87  
 Koti 193, 195, 196, 198, 200, 300, 332  
 Koti Archana 193, 195, 196, 198, 200  
 Kotiettu 308, 332, 341, 347  
 Krishna Puja 306  
 Krishnapparunthu 332, 368  
 Kshethrapalan 321  
 Kshetra Praveshana Vilambaram 174, 175  
 Kshetra Sanyasi 298, 379  
 Kshetrakaryam Potti 309, 436  
 Kshetrapalan 45, 50, 134, 154, 238, 285, 286,  
 316, 319, 323, 343, 355, 404  
 Kula Devata 432  
 Kulasekhara Mandapam 130-133, 178, 184,  
 187, 196, 228, 234, 240-242, 245, 248,  
 312, 318, 352  
 Kulasekhara Perumal 18, 56, 57, 63, 64, 67,  
 78, 80, 95, 97, 110, 123, 124, 130, 131,  
 142, 149, 153, 156, 160, 161, 164, 205,  
 206, 235, 240, 242, 254, 357, 358, 437  
 Kulavazha 153, 195, 200, 434  
 Kulavazha Chirappu 153, 154, 195, 200, 434  
 Kumbha Deepam 319  
 Kumbhabhishekam 79, 206, 207, 211  
 Kundalini 10-12, 53, 54, 274  
 Kuta 20, 300, 304  
 Kutaettam 300  
 Kutam 207, 329  
 Kutumba Devata 432

## L

Lakshadeepam 31, 118, 119, 141, 171, 181,  
 187, 190, 197, 198, 323, 344, 350, 352,  
 353, 354, 411, 420  
 Lakshmi Devi 43, 253, 287, 289, 315, 347,  
 385, 409, 422, 424

## M

Madappally 79, 82, 236  
 Madhom 80  
 Maha Danas 124, 153, 356, 436  
 Maha Kshetram 31, 32, 39, 55

Maha Mruthyunjaya Homam 193  
 Maha Vishnu 14, 18, 21, 32, 34, 35, 38-40,  
 46, 47, 50, 51, 58, 63, 78, 134, 225, 231,  
 232, 243, 246, 247, 250, 252, 257, 263,  
 292, 293, 342, 350, 376, 381, 382, 384,  
 392, 399  
 Mahabharathakonu 73, 268, 300, 312  
 Mahabharatham 30, 32, 49, 80, 83, 154, 188,  
 231, 280, 286, 291, 312, 379  
 Mahabhishekam 121  
 Mahadanas 131  
 Mahagayathri 287  
 Mahakavyam 407  
 Mahalakshmi 231, 261, 288  
 Moolam Thirunal, Maharaja 163, 165, 167,  
 168, 328  
 Mahatmyam 24, 57, 267, 293, 377, 379, 391,  
 410  
 Makara Matsyam 41, 229, 258  
 Makara Siveli 200, 345, 346, 349, 352, 354,  
 436  
 Malika 96, 125  
 Mamankom 125  
 Mandapam 20, 32, 44, 45, 50, 51, 64  
 Mandira Moorthies 240  
 Manikandha 122  
 Manipravalam 381, 400, 403, 404, 406, 422  
 Manipura Chakram 11  
 Mannuneer Koral 328, 329  
 Manomayakosam 274  
 Mantram 36, 303, 404  
 Markandeya 43, 228, 263  
 Markandeyan 44, 47, 247  
 Marma 23  
 Mathilakam 6, 68, 70, 73, 82, 86, 113, 128,  
 143, 163, 164, 178, 180, 198, 228, 271,  
 283, 294, 295, 308, 309, 320, 321, 330,  
 346, 347, 364, 413, 414, 434  
 Matsya Rekha 41  
 Melkkettu 187  
 Meni Thulappayasam 317, 360  
 Meru Chakram 51, 251  
 Meru Goswamy 285  
 Moola Mantram 37, 306, 312  
 Moola Vighram 44, 115, 263, 291, 295  
 Mootha Panikkar Thottathu Ashari 132, 240  
 Moothashari 219, 232  
 Mriga-mala 286  
 Mudra 151, 418  
 Mukha Mandapam 90, 93  
 Mukhappu 234



Mukta Jeevatma 47  
 Mula Puja 329, 330  
 Muladravyas 329  
 Mulappalika 329, 337  
 Mulappura 329  
 Mulayital 295, 329, 330  
 Mullamoottu Bhagavathar 343  
 Mundu 326, 432, 436  
 Mura Siveli 353  
 Murajapam 19, 70, 117-119, 133, 141, 156,  
 160, 161, 171, 178, 190, 197, 198, 222,  
 294, 302, 307, 323, 344, 345, 350-355,  
 411  
 Muzhukkappu 141, 176, 323, 324, 353, 360,  
 362

## N

Nabhi 11, 287  
 Nabhijanma 287  
 Nada Brahman 35, 311, 351  
 Nadam 35, 36, 277  
 Nadi Bandhanam 265, 266  
 Naduvil 298  
 Naduvil Madhom 4, 19, 28, 48, 168, 298,  
 301, 302, 390  
 Naga Deepam 319  
 Nagam 53  
 Nagaraja 19  
 Nagarua Kavu 39  
 Nagaswaram 133, 277, 320, 324, 336  
 Nalam Kalasam 79  
 Nalambalam 116, 172, 173, 190, 198, 204,  
 209, 238, 248, 249, 255, 258, 268-270,  
 274, 285, 289, 291, 317, 318, 320, 321,  
 324, 331, 337, 341, 343, 347, 350, 351,  
 355, 400  
 Namaskara Mandapam 154, 205, 208, 213,  
 226, 237, 271, 274, 312  
 Namaskaram 90, 239, 311  
 Nambi Madhom 304, 318  
 Nammalvar 254, 385, 389, 400  
 Nandavanam 16, 66, 372  
 Nandiyarvattam 299  
 Narada 42, 247, 263, 306  
 Narasimha 8, 44, 47-49, 105, 125, 126, 147,  
 152, 153, 155, 173, 200, 215, 221-223,  
 243, 245, 255, 258, 263, 267-269,  
 285-288, 300, 304, 306, 311, 313,  
 316-320, 324, 330-332, 334, 336, 337,  
 341, 345, 347, 350, 353, 360, 366, 367,  
 378, 391, 395, 402-404, 423, 425, 436

Narayana 10, 30, 59, 306, 387, 399, 408  
 Narayaneeyam 419  
 Nata 19, 20, 43, 49, 198, 216, 217, 228, 229,  
 235, 237, 238, 261, 262, 268-270, 278,  
 309, 335, 337, 338, 340, 346, 350, 355  
 Natakashala 180, 225, 343  
 Natakashala Mukhappu 116, 179, 189, 195,  
 199, 230, 240, 279, 285, 326, 340, 350  
 Natakashala-vidvans 282  
 Navagrahas 19, 70, 260, 271  
 Navakam 125, 341  
 Navarathri 22, 152, 460  
 Navaretnas 79  
 Naveekarana Kalasam 154  
 Nayanar 254  
 Nayanars 63, 254  
 Nayik style 254, 257, 275  
 Neela 43  
 Neerazhi 96  
 Neettu 83, 99  
 Neryathu 432  
 Nira and Puthari 349  
 Nira Vilakku 190  
 Nirgunam 39  
 Nirmalya Moorthy 46, 53, 316  
 Nirmalya Puja 83  
 Nirmalyam 172, 349  
 Nirvedam 252  
 Nitya Jeevatma 38, 46, 47  
 Nityadana Chilavu 207  
 Nivedyam 28, 46, 65, 66, 172, 184, 199, 238,  
 246, 276, 304, 315, 316, 318-320, 322,  
 323, 330, 340, 342, 347, 349, 353, 360,  
 365, 370, 435

## O

Omkaram 41, 262  
 Ona Villu 184, 197, 301, 326, 436  
 Oottaras 239  
 Oru Divasathe Puja 358, 362  
 Otta Ada 320, 361  
 Otta Thulappayasam 324, 327, 328, 353, 434  
 Ottakkal Mandapam 20, 32, 45, 79, 90, 112,  
 113, 116, 119, 122, 124, 128, 191-193,  
 200, 207, 209, 218, 226, 260-263, 267,  
 275, 276, 300, 309, 310, 314, 315,  
 317-320, 329-331, 337, 340, 343, 345,  
 347, 349, 350, 355, 359, 432, 433



**P**

- Pachu Moothathu 293  
 Padhathi Sampradayam 32, 303  
 Padma Teertham 15, 19, 23, 113, 114, 119,  
 132, 134, 156, 159, 191, 221, 229, 284,  
 350, 351, 376, 378, 380, 396, 399  
 Padmagarbham 161  
 Padmam 11, 35, 40, 41, 54  
 Padmanabha Keerthanam 409, 416  
 Padmasanam 34, 244  
 Pakshi-mala 286  
 Pal Manga 349  
 Palaazhi 264, 410  
 Pallakku Vahanam 159, 333, 334  
 Palli Vetta 93, 100, 143, 163, 237, 304, 309,  
 330, 333, 335, 336, 420, 423, 436  
 Palli Villu 325  
 Palppayasam 114, 135, 183, 218, 350, 360,  
 361, 410  
 Panakam 320, 361  
 Panam 203  
 Pancha Bhootas 12, 52  
 Pancha-mala 285, 288  
 Panchagavyam 125, 314, 315, 357, 433  
 Panchagavyathu Nambi 4, 69, 87, 90, 95, 295,  
 304, 308, 310, 314, 315, 320, 326, 331,  
 350, 393  
 Panchakshari 242, 247  
 Panchaloham 44, 46, 47, 49, 259-261, 268,  
 275  
 Panchamayakosam 273  
 Panchapsaras 380  
 Pancharatram 306, 307  
 Panchendriyas 12, 38, 52  
 Pandi-vadyam 314, 315  
 Pani 36, 320  
 Pantheeradi Palppayasam 116, 118, 316  
 Pantheeradi Puja 362  
 Panthrandu Kalam Payasam 99  
 Paramananda Yogamoorthy 306  
 Parameswara 18, 243, 256, 262, 323, 347,  
 388  
 Parasurama Padhathi 293  
 Parikarmi 245  
 Parthivapuram 20, 299  
 Pati and Patiyettam 166, 433, 434  
 Pattu 194, 216, 343, 434  
 Peetham 38, 262, 350  
 Periya Nambi 4, 70, 71, 98, 135, 142, 155,  
 186, 194, 268, 295, 304, 308, 310, 314,  
 315, 320, 328, 331, 337, 339, 340, 343,  
 349, 350, 355, 366, 393, 434, 436  
 Periya Santhi 305, 310, 314-321, 326, 330,  
 331, 337, 339, 343  
 Periya Swamiyar 308  
 Perumal 20, 31, 40, 86, 96, 99, 103, 116,  
 117, 121, 123, 127, 133, 138, 145, 149,  
 153, 204, 223, 239, 257, 276, 287, 304,  
 314, 315, 318, 328-331, 333, 340, 346,  
 347, 354, 387, 402, 406, 414, 417, 418,  
 432, 433, 436  
 Perumal Palace 145  
 Perumal-Parai 66, 204  
 Perumpadappu Mooppan 132  
 Perumpadappu Swaroopam 99  
 Perumthiru Amrithethu Puja 99, 118  
 Perumthiru Amrithu Puja 346, 349  
 Peyadichan Mandapam 221, 236, 333  
 Phala Sruthi 389  
 Pithru Teertham 15, 66, 396  
 Plakka 349  
 Pongal 316, 342, 360  
 Ponnum Siveli 71, 165, 197, 201, 324, 326,  
 333, 342, 351, 434  
 Pooradom Thirunal Sethu Lakshmi Bayi,  
 Maharani 166, 168  
 Poorna Kalasa 121  
 Pooruruttathi Thirunal Iravi Iravi Varma  
 81, 276  
 Potti 19, 21, 69, 74, 75, 76, 88, 101, 106,  
 109, 111, 220, 304, 307, 309, 322, 333,  
 334, 339, 435  
 Pranajalam 12  
 Pranaprathishta 44  
 Pranava Maha Mantram 300  
 Pranavam 35, 50, 262, 269, 368  
 Prasadam 61, 71, 185, 194, 301, 316, 319,  
 321, 325, 337, 349, 354, 355, 368,  
 383-385, 433  
 Prasanna Puja 318  
 Prathamam 346  
 Pratyaksha Padmanabha 169  
 Prayaschitha Roopas 258  
 Pulavalayma 101  
 Pulayi 26, 27  
 Puliylakkara 432  
 Punyaham 339, 350  
 Purushasooktam 312  
 Pushpaka Vimanam 288  
 Pushpanjali 28, 105, 298-302, 315, 317, 319,  
 368, 390  
 Pushpanjali Swamiyar 19, 28, 48, 65, 73, 105,  
 162, 168, 294, 298, 301-304, 307, 308,  
 317, 328, 390, 425, 435



Pustaka Danam 375  
 Puthari 350  
 Putharikkandom Maitanam 16

## R

Rama Swamy 51, 124, 141, 192, 197, 198,  
 213, 259, 305, 316, 318, 319, 325, 326,  
 365  
 Ramanujacharya 399  
 Ramayanam 49, 83, 231, 241, 246, 253, 258,  
 267, 283, 286, 289, 291, 326, 408  
 Randam Mura 4  
 Renovation 28, 63, 64, 79, 82, 94, 96-98,  
 111, 112, 127, 154, 164, 172-174, 186,  
 198, 200, 201, 206, 209, 217, 227, 228,  
 270, 272, 287, 290, 395  
 Retnappayasam 132, 172, 346  
 Revathi Thirunal Veera Iravi Iravi Varma 97  
 Rig Vedam 42, 49, 311, 350, 374

## S

Sahasradala Padmam 35, 54, 274  
 Sahasranamam 312, 350, 352, 353, 387  
 Sahasaram 11  
 Saiva 36  
 Saiva Salagrama 42, 262  
 Saivite 22, 61, 63, 73, 254, 255, 343  
 Sala Yakshi 224  
 Salagrama 25, 27, 39, 52, 114, 236, 271, 315,  
 428  
 Samadhi 19, 38, 50, 105, 162, 168, 301, 425  
 Samadhi Kshetram 38  
 Samrudhyardham 347  
 Sangramadheera Ravi Varma Kulasekhara 68,  
 71, 398  
 Sanyasin 301  
 Sapta Rishies 20, 49, 214  
 Saptanadies 265  
 Sapha Sindhu Teertham 172  
 Saphaham 197  
 Saraswathi Devi 199, 290, 327  
 Sarkara Payasam 316, 318, 323, 360  
 Sarvajnanatmayeti 48  
 Sarvanganathan 76, 77, 205, 271, 272, 403,  
 404, 406  
 Sarvanganathan Adithya Varma 76, 77, 271,  
 272, 403, 406  
 Sastha 45, 50, 118, 140, 192, 193, 228, 236,  
 237, 282, 287, 288, 290, 313, 316, 319,  
 321, 322, 323, 348, 358, 361, 395, 401  
 Sat 34, 35, 46

Satta Variyola 144  
 Satyalokam 53  
 Seshasayee 391  
 Shankhu 33, 277, 331  
 Shankhu Teertham 378, 380, 396  
 Shantakaram 305  
 Shantakararoopam 37  
 Shantaswaroopam 253  
 Shodasa Maha Danas 124, 131, 153  
 Shodasopachara Puja 306  
 Silparetnam 226, 248, 286  
 Simha Vyali 253  
 Simhala 278  
 Simhasana Vahanam 54, 117, 130, 324, 331,  
 333, 334, 351, 389  
 Siva Lingam 21, 42, 79, 228, 247, 267, 315  
 Siva Shakti Panchakshari 242  
 Sivaratri 347  
 Siveli 39, 43, 47, 50, 71, 94, 117, 135, 147,  
 149, 154, 165, 197, 199, 214, 219, 233,  
 234, 237, 257, 273, 276-278, 284, 300,  
 304, 310, 312, 315, 317-320, 324, 327,  
 331, 333-335, 337, 342, 343, 345, 346,  
 351, 353, 354, 410, 422  
 Siveli Bimbam 39, 43, 263, 331, 341, 343  
 Sivelippura 115, 116, 153, 185-187, 190, 192,  
 196, 201, 219, 232-240, 248, 252, 253,  
 255, 273, 277, 301, 320, 336-338,  
 342-344, 350, 351, 354, 355, 389, 413,  
 436  
 Sopanam 45, 191, 209, 226, 259, 260, 261,  
 267, 272  
 Sree Adi Sankara 48, 390  
 Sree Padmanabha Teertham 378  
 Sree Rama Navami 348  
 Sreebeli 79, 82, 84, 109, 197, 234, 366, 407  
 Sreebhandaram 90  
 Sreebhootabeli 220, 221, 293, 333, 341  
 Sreekaryakar 236  
 Sreekovil 39, 115, 210, 226, 262, 263, 267,  
 285, 287, 299, 304, 307, 309, 310, 315,  
 317, 321, 322, 331, 337, 342, 347, 349,  
 350, 404, 410, 413, 414, 433  
 Sreemukham 2  
 Sreepadam 83, 229, 237, 396  
 Sreepadasooktam 312  
 Sreevatsam 43, 416  
 Sthala Puranam 27, 28, 32, 212  
 Sthapati 232  
 Stotram 416  
 Stupikalasa 262  
 Sun 12, 34, 35, 38, 42, 123, 389  
 Sureswaracharya 48



Swamiyar 25, 27, 28, 48, 54, 62, 65, 66, 73,  
74, 83, 92, 105, 111, 112, 122, 162, 163,  
264, 298-302, 305, 307, 308, 310, 317,  
326, 328, 334, 346, 368, 435  
Swamiyar Madhom 317  
Swargam 190, 342, 343  
Swargavathil 268, 343  
Swargavathil Ekadesi 140, 200, 277, 342  
Swarna Alankara Mandapam 267  
Swarna Kshetram 384  
Swaroopam 72, 89, 271  
Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma, Maharaja 23,  
67, 102, 148, 149, 155, 156, 285, 418,  
434  
Swayambhu 236, 322

## T

Tamas 38, 52, 252  
Tantram 32, 41, 45, 220, 292-296, 303, 308,  
427  
Tantri 28, 45, 64, 78, 79, 84, 91, 100, 105,  
114, 115, 126, 131, 163, 199, 215, 221,  
222, 249, 270, 292-296, 308, 322,  
330-333, 336, 337, 339-341, 355, 357,  
358, 435, 437  
Teertham 19, 221, 339, 355, 383, 396  
Teerthas 15, 32, 66, 214, 376, 378, 380, 383,  
395, 396  
Temple well 71, 80, 86, 198, 236  
Thamara 299  
Thavazhi 79  
Thazhikkakutams 82, 129, 230, 231, 257  
Thekkaidam 318, 331  
Thekke Madhom 298  
Thetti 299, 348  
Thevaram 316, 322  
Thiru Ampati 7, 25, 50, 65, 76, 90, 112, 116,  
130, 135, 141, 147, 154, 159, 165, 189,  
192, 199, 208, 209, 213, 217, 237, 238,  
239, 270-272, 276, 282, 286, 289, 299,  
304, 306, 312, 313, 318-320, 326, 328,  
331, 332, 336, 339, 341, 349, 353, 361,  
404  
Thiru Onam 25, 62, 84, 134, 182, 184, 198,  
200, 207, 271, 277, 322-326, 328, 341,  
347, 436  
Thiru Utayatayalam 194, 326, 434  
Thiru Vilakku 216  
Thirumaal 382  
Thirumadappally 96  
Thirumeni Kaval Kurup 48, 314, 318, 320,  
321, 326  
Thirumudi Kalasam 126, 355, 435  
Thirumukham 263

Thirumuttam 227, 237  
Thirunal 84  
Thirunokku Mandapam 269, 329  
Thiruppathies 30, 58, 228, 400  
Thiruvilakkam 331, 337, 436  
Thiruvolakka Mandapam 99, 116, 216, 269,  
343, 366  
Thorthu 326  
Thotta 240  
Thretha Yugam 55  
Thrikkarthika 342  
Thrimadhuram 316, 318, 360, 361  
Thrippadam 50  
Thrippappoor Mooppam 67, 77, 78, 82,  
84-87, 91-93, 96, 97, 100, 101, 107, 108,  
111, 217, 295, 358, 433, 435  
Thrippati Danam 30, 67, 78, 86, 92, 118,  
119, 121, 131, 175, 183, 188, 220, 297,  
335, 344, 357, 373, 409, 431, 432, 435  
Thrivikrama Avatharam 289  
Thulabharakkal 205, 235  
Thulabharam 116, 179, 183, 235, 239, 357,  
362  
Thulapurusha Danam 56, 61, 63, 95, 118,  
123, 124, 130, 131, 142, 153, 156, 160,  
161, 164, 188, 206, 235, 294, 356-358,  
436, 437  
Thulasi 122, 299, 324, 379, 383, 384, 404,  
419, 426, 432, 433  
Tulu Brahmins 26, 54, 305, 393, 435

## U

Ucha Puja 303, 318, 326, 341, 342, 345, 347,  
349, 362  
Udavaal 331, 335, 337, 340, 349, 436  
Unjal Mandapam 51, 131, 221, 235, 236, 237,  
239, 333  
Unni Appam 199, 318, 320, 360, 361  
Upanayanam 433  
Upasakan 48  
Upparikkam Malika 125  
Uppumanga 315-318, 320  
Usha Nivedyam 316  
Usha Puja 135, 362  
Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma 119,  
195, 223, 355, 430  
Uthrittathi Thirunal 146  
Uthrom Thirunal Marthanda Varma 148, 156,  
327  
Utsava Anujna 436  
Utsava Kalasam 329, 473  
Utsava Prabandham 152, 422  
Utsava Sivali 327



Utsavam 92, 99, 100, 167, 197, 257, 263,  
270, 296, 300, 302-304, 309, 312,  
328-330, 334, 337, 340-342, 347, 355,  
359, 397, 398, 402, 422, 423, 435  
Uttama Yoga Moorthy 263

## V

Vadakkajdam 318  
Vadakke Madhom 298  
Vahana Puja 333, 337  
Vahanam 54  
Vaideekans 137  
Vaikuntham 379, 389, 415  
Vaishnavite 21, 22, 44, 59, 63, 71, 140, 254,  
255, 285, 335, 383, 385, 406, 427  
Vaiswadeva Homam 316  
Valia Kalasas 341  
Valia Kanikka 153, 334  
Valia Madappally 236  
Valia Palppayasam 316  
Vana-mala 286  
Vanabhojanam 288, 289  
Vanavasam 46, 275, 379  
Vanchi 89  
Vanchi Nadu 61, 230  
Vanchi Raja Vamsham 56, 61  
Vanchiyar Kulapathi 58, 60  
Varaha Puranam 376  
Varaham 376  
Vattaka Prasadam 194, 309, 433, 434  
Vazhipadu 359, 360, 360  
Veda Mantra Japam 350  
Veda Vyasa 49, 164, 200, 215, 268, 312, 313,  
316, 361, 362, 375, 380, 404  
Vedas 34, 37, 42, 49, 54, 72, 119, 199, 243,  
255, 274, 306, 311, 344, 350, 356, 357,  
370, 399, 405, 412  
Veera Adithya Varma 64, 85, 294, 308  
Veera Iravi Iravi Varma 68, 78, 81, 85, 439  
Veera Iravi Varma 86, 88, 118, 217  
Veera Kotha Marthanda Varma 80  
Veera Rama Udaya Marthanda Varma 69, 73  
Venad 18, 21, 25, 56-64, 66, 70, 76, 79-81,  
85, 87, 89, 107, 123, 125, 128, 146, 150,  
204, 228, 294, 385, 393, 399, 404, 405  
Vettakkorumakan 15, 141, 287, 288, 293, 335  
Vibhooti 245, 358  
Vidya 52  
Vigraham 109, 262  
Vijayan 44, 231, 251, 253, 261  
Vilakku Madom 79, 116, 172, 222, 270, 272  
Villu 184  
Vilpattu 413  
Vilva Sarappoli Mala 354

Vilvamangalam 18, 19, 27, 44, 212, 261, 301,  
302, 304, 317, 395, 397, 411  
Vimanam 79, 124, 236, 262  
Vinayaka Chathurthi 192, 322, 325  
Vishaghom Thirunal, Maharaja 160, 167  
Vishnu 9, 11, 14, 18-22, 25, 26, 32, 34-36,  
38-40, 42-44, 46, 47, 49-51, 56, 58, 60,  
61, 63, 78, 88, 90, 112-114, 119, 134,  
154, 169, 195, 225, 231, 232, 235,  
241-244, 246, 247, 250, 252-254, 256,  
257, 261-263, 267, 269, 271, 276, 279,  
287-289, 292, 293, 297, 303, 306, 308,  
310-312, 322, 323, 342, 350, 355, 373,  
376-385, 389, 391-393, 398, 399, 405,  
406, 408, 415, 429  
Vishnu Amsham 355  
Vishnu Padam 40  
Vishnu Puja 306  
Vishnu Sahasranamam 311, 312  
Vishnu Samhita 306  
Vishu 193, 348, 349, 436  
Vishukani 348  
Vishwakseman 198, 285, 289  
Visishta-advaitam 54  
Vraj Bhasha 418  
Vrischikom 134, 174, 193, 209, 342, 366  
Vyaghrapada Muni 287  
Vyali 229, 230, 233, 251, 252, 253, 258

## W

Wall 17, 19, 42, 47, 104, 117, 164, 185, 197,  
199, 200, 202, 204, 206, 208, 209, 210,  
215, 216, 228, 229, 234, 235, 238, 239,  
256, 257, 259, 262, 264, 268, 269, 270,  
272, 273, 275, 285, 287, 289-291, 300,  
321, 368

## Y

Yadavendrakiladaivam 57, 58  
Yajnam 344  
Yajnopaveetham 281  
Yatrotsavam 402  
Yoga Dandu 26  
Yoga Nidra 11, 37, 262, 378, 384, 388, 395  
Yoga Sastram 35  
Yogakkar 74, 101-104, 106, 107, 331, 337,  
340, 346  
Yogathil Potties 75, 110, 308, 320, 321, 328

## Z

Zamindar 77  
Zamorin 125, 137, 163, 199, 281, 298







~~11th~~ 15th of August 2012  
 Mookerji IFS (Retd) Collection Jammu  
 every Sunday of the last  
 English in Jammu at 11 AM  
 at. Annual fair  
 of this company of family  
 it is really a fair of goods  
 of books and English version of  
 Hindi and English Temple Sundry  
 this fair is held at Trivandrum  
 Temple not visited at. See - 2nd bar 6  
 to the exhibition  
 Photography is a ~~very~~ <sup>new</sup> ~~thing~~ <sup>art</sup> over  
 is based on some replica of  
 values. Process of culture of  
 traditions followed all over India  
 & it gives us a glimpse of  
 our great civilisation  
 Pishinani has contributed  
 in the development of this  
 in the form of a village.





Princess Aswathi Thirunal  
Gouri Lakshmi Bayi

### About the Author

Her Highness Aswathi Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, a member of the Royal Family of the former princely State of Travancore, is the niece of His Highness Sree Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma, the last ruler of the State. A Graduate in Economics, she has distinguished herself as a writer. She has to her credit over one hundred and fifty poems and several articles in English, most of which have been published in some of the prominent journals in India and abroad. Her first book *Thirumulkazhcha* has been a compilation of her poems, which were an expression of her deep emotion on the last days and subsequent demise of her beloved uncle. The Dawn her next work, is a collection of poems on a variety of themes, published by Macmillan India Limited. This, her third book *Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple* is not only a treatise on the Temple, but also a testament of her deep faith in her family Deity. Her latest book titled *Thulasi Garland* deals with thirty three temples of the erstwhile State of Travancore. She has also translated from Malayalam to English Shri. P.R. Rama Varma Raja's book titled *Sree Sabarimala Ayyappa Charitham*. She is a gifted speaker as well.

Married to Shri. R.R. Varma of Paliakkara Western Palace, Thiruvalla, she is blessed with two sons.

*Treatise : A serious book  
a piece of writing  
writing about a  
particular subject.*

*Incident: Evidence  
that something exists  
is true*

*Y. D. 5-2-07*



